Fakir Chandra Dutta

MY FIRST CRIME.

BY

GUSTAVE MACÉ,

CHIEF OF THE PARIS DETECTIVE POLICE.

With Illustrations.

"An account by a real Lecoq of a real crime is a novelty among the mass of criminal novels with which the world has been favoured since the death of the great originator Gaboriau. It is to M. Macé, who has had to deal with real *juges d'instruction*, real *agents de la sûreté*, and real murderers, that we are indebted for this really interesting addition to a species of literature which has of late begun to pall."—*Saturday Review.*

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MY FIRST CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

TWO POLICEMEN.—THE CARREFOUR DE BUCI.—THE UNKNOWN.

BEFORE the political events of 1870, the Parisian police used to have one of the serial letters A, B, C—according to the division to which they belonged—fixed by silver cord to the collar of their uniform. The rotation on duty of the various divisions occurred every three days, according to the arrangement set forth in the following table:—

	1st day.	2nd day.	3rd day.
From 7 a.m. to 10 a.m.	A	B	C
From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.	C	A	B
From 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.	A	B	C
From 5 p.m. to 9 p.m.	B	C	A
From 9 p.m. to midnight	A	B	C
From midnight to 7 a.m.	C	A	B

The period from midnight to seven in the morning was known by the name of *Night Duty*. From midnight to two in the morning the entire body of night-duty men was dispersed about the capital. At two o'clock, half the officers returned to the chief office, where they remained in attendance, until the arrival of the next division, which went on duty at seven o'clock. In the daytime, the men of the division

paraded singly within the specified area, known as the *beat*; while during the night, according to the number of available men, a more or less extended area was assigned to each squad, which generally consisted of two men. The senior constable took the right-hand side of the streets under his charge, while his colleague followed on the other side, a few paces behind him. All idle chatter between them was thus checked, and they were enabled to listen attentively to the slightest noise of a suspicious character.

The Sixth Arrondissement, where the drama which we are about to relate occurred, had at that time an average force of two hundred constables, apportioned to the four districts in which the police-stations were situated:

Rue Christine, for the district of La Monnaie;

Rue des Saints-Pères, for that of Saint-Germain-des-Prés;

Rue des Missions, for Notre-Dame-des-Champs;

Place Saint-Sulpice, for the Odéon, where the central station was situated, as well as the office of the superintendent who had all the constables of the Arrondissement under his command.

This short explanation is necessary in order that the reader should be able to follow without confusion the various phases of a mysterious crime which, a few years ago, greatly excited the population of Paris.

During the night between Monday, the 21st, and Tuesday, the 22nd of December, 1868, the constables of the A division came on duty at ten minutes to twelve. Crinsip, a young second-corporal, in charge of the police-station in the Rue Christine, had just gone over the roll-call of his fifteen men. They had all answered more or less smartly by the traditional word *Present!* After a minute inspection, in order to make sure that each of them was in a condition to perform his regulation duty, Crinsip read out the order of the day relating to punishments and rewards, gave his customary advice to his subordinates, and added some special instructions of the utmost importance for this particular night.

It was a question of surprising a gang of criminals of the most dangerous character in the very act. The culprits

were housebreakers, of exceptional audacity and perfectly organised, whose exploits had spread terror amongst the tradespeople of that district. Several shops had been burglariously rifled night after night, and the investigations made clearly proved that the doors, windows, and shutters, whether of wood or iron, that had been forced, all showed similar indications—in other words, traces of the same tools, handled by skilled and experienced men. In some establishments, the instruments used to force the more stubborn places had been left behind; and, amongst the collections of chisels, jemmies, and skeleton-keys, certain hammers, of a peculiar and hitherto unknown kind, had been found. Their shape very much resembled that of a large reel; while the material of which they were composed was indeed a strange one. This was a mixture of different metals, cast in moulds, and the alloy of which had combined so well that the hammers were at one and the same time solid, light, and, above all, *non-sounding*. The heaviest strokes produced no echo. The handle, short and easy to the grip, was not of wood, but of whalebone, which gave it a remarkable elasticity. The hammers were, in a word, real magic hammers, and only a positive genius for wickedness could have inspired such a conception.

For once, and on his own authority, Crinsip, putting aside the traditions of an obstinate and stupid routine, had recommended his men not to adhere to the usual line of their beats but to march rapidly to and fro in various directions, to lay in ambush in the crossways—in a word, to change completely the regular and monotonous course of their nightly rounds. He was perfectly right in acting thus. Criminals know, better than anyone else, the arrangement and usual course of the policeman's rounds, as well as the numerous details of his duties; and nothing is easier for them than to determine the hour and minute even, at which to commit a theft at any given spot, without fear of their being disturbed by the police. According to an expression of their own, they know how to choose the time when they can *work at their ease and in safety*.

By way of conclusion to his instructions, Crinsip had added: "Every individual whose appearance or behaviour is suspicious, every belated person carrying bundles of doubt-

ful origin, must be questioned, and, in case of unsatisfactory explanations, be taken there and then to the central office, where the chief sergeant will be permanently present from one o'clock in the morning."

This said, he distributed his men in twos, and, at the stroke of midnight, they all left the station-house to go on duty. Ringué, an old policeman, and Champy, a young auxiliary, went straight to the Carrefour de Buci, which was assigned to them as their central point for watching. The weather was cloudy and cold—a dark December cold. The thermometer indicated twenty-seven degrees The rapid footsteps of belated pedestrians hurrying home could be distinctly heard on the pavement.

"The Carrefour de Buci is just the place for observing," said Ringué to his young colleague. "If we could only nab the gang! What a windfall that would be for us! You would be promoted straight away, and I should be sure of my stripes as second-corporal. Why, I have been down for promotion for the last two years."

Ringué was a Parisian; he had already done ten years' service in the police, and was in the first class, which entitled him to the yearly pay of fifteen hundred francs. A former Crimean veteran, wounded under the walls of Sebastopol, he had gained the soldier's medal, that reward for obscure heroes. The auxiliary, Champy, who came from Chaumont in the Haute Marne, had, in his boyhood, likewise hoped to wear the uniform of his country's defenders; but, having lost his father and being the eldest son of a widow, he had been obliged to stay at home to support his sick mother and become the protector of his young sister. After two rescues effected by him, not without danger to himself, in the rivers Marne and Suize, the Prefect of the Department had awarded him a silver medal of honour; and on the recommendation of Monsieur Tombaille, a respectable trader in Chaumont, whose only child he had saved, Champy had become a candidate for the post of policeman at Paris. In spite of the strong recommendation of his protector, his application had nearly been an unsuccessful one. In order to gain admission to the police corps, where acts of devotion or of courage go for nought, it was necessary to prove former service in the

army, or in one of the important departments of the State. Champy, not being able to show anything of this nature, found this a serious hindrance in the way of his admission. Nevertheless, on careful consideration, the board of inquiry, taking notice of the *civil courage* displayed by him in his two rescues, made a favourable report, and he was admitted as a probationer. Since he had entered upon his duties, Champy had been associated with Ringué, who was charged with his professional education. The latter, it must be said, acquitted himself conscientiously of his task, which reminded him of his work as sergeant-instructor to his regiment.

From midnight to one o'clock in the morning, the two policemen heard scarcely anything except the noise of shutters, announcing the closing of the neighbouring dramshops — institutions which, in accordance with habit, were disposed to remain open as long as possible, and which, in 1868, were already very numerous in this portion of the great city of Paris. After the closing of these dramshops, their male and female customers, before finally separating, met in the Rue de l'Ecole-de-Médecine, at Mother Tribord's, a dealer in preserved fruit, at the sign of the Gros-Nœud-Marin. Although nowadays almost abandoned by students, the Carrefour de Buci was still at this time the centre of the Latin Quarter. Several generations of noisy and studious youths had succeeded one another there; and, quite as much from natural kindness as desire to obey the recommendations of their superiors, the policemen showed themselves full of forbearance and toleration for these unruly youngsters, who, after having once sown their wild oats in all directions, become grave and serious men. Accustomed to every kind of shindy, Ringué, respecting the ancient adage, "Youth must have its fling," paid but little attention to the noise made by the male and *female* students who were steering in groups in the direction of the Gros-Nœud-Marin. Whilst waiting until the street was less crowded, he made use of all his talent as instructor to explain to Champy, who understood nothing about the matter, the rotation of the A, B, C divisions of the Paris police.

"But," said Champy, "when your letter A is on duty—as now, for instance—what may letter B be doing?"

"Why, resting, of course," replied Ringué.

"And letter C?"

"Likewise resting."

"And when B is on duty, what becomes of C?"

"That division is still resting."

"Then it is always resting—a lot of lazy fellows who must be getting fat—I am glad I don't belong to them."

"No more lazy than you and I, old fellow, for in their turn—but I will explain all this to you when we are off duty, if you will kindly call upon me in the Rue Montfaucon, where I will indicate to you on paper the regular rotation of these three divisions. Now that the neighbourhood is getting deserted, we must watch; this is the moment for taking up our positions. Here is a little nook where we can easily hide."

The place pointed out by Ringué was admirably suited for watching the different streets abutting on to the Carrefour. Pulling up the hoods of their cloaks, the two constables took up their positions in the place they had selected, where their figures formed nothing but a black mass, scarcely visible five paces off. Whilst continuing to talk in whispers, they looked in the direction of the Rues Dauphine, Saint-André-des-Arts, Ancienne-Comédie, Grégoire-de-Tours, Buci, and Mazarine. Ringué on his part related to Champy how a very eccentric old *savant* living a couple of paces off, in the Cour du Commerce, had given him, as well as several of his colleagues, a pamphlet containing the etymology of the principal streets of the Arrondissement.

"Look you," he said, "on the very spot where we are now standing at this identical moment, there formerly stood the Porte de Buci, pulled down in 1672. In 1418, Perrinet Leclerc had delivered it up to the Burgundians. It is also on this same spot that the first platform was built for enrolling volunteers *in the name of the country in danger* in 1792—"

"*Here's a fellow with a bundle!*" suddenly interrupted Champy, looking in the direction of the Rue Mazarine.

"You are right," replied Ringué in a whisper, following the direction of his junior's gaze. "He's a fellow who

strikes me as being a suspicious character. We must examine what he's carrying."

"Perhaps he belongs to the famous gang," added Champy.

"What luck! if we were to lay hands on one of those rascals!"

"I rather fancy, old fellow, that you are sure of your stripes this time."

"As for stripes—I have been expecting them for such a time that I am beginning to despair. But never mind about them now:—duty is the word."

"Look! he is coming this way."

"Not a word—not a movement!" concluded Ringué, clutching his companion's arm.

The two constables remained perfectly still, watching the individual who was coming from the Rue Mazarine. This night-prowler advanced rapidly in the direction of the square, and stopped undecided. By the light of a street-lamp the officials were able to examine him at their leisure. He was short in stature, but somewhat stout. His hair, cropped close, appeared to be black, as well as his beard. Wearing a tall hat, he had a rug, which partly hid his over-coat, thrown over his shoulders. Beneath his right-arm one could see a large parcel, whilst his left-arm was passed through the two handles of a basket. After having looked about him for a moment, the unknown advanced rapidly towards the entrance of the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours, which he was going to follow, when, starting all of a sudden from their hiding-place, the two constables barred his passage.

"Where the deuce may you be going to, so fast, at this time of night, loaded like a Spanish mule?" Ringué said to him in a bantering tone of voice.

The unknown, taken aback, remained mute.

"Why don't you answer?" went on Ringué. "Very well then, off you go to the head office! you shall explain yourself to the chief sergeant." Then, turning in the direction of his colleague, Ringué added, "Be on the look-out, friend Champy, and have a care he doesn't drop any-thing."

After the fashion of a constable of the old school, Champy stood erect on the stranger's left.

Recovering his self-possession, the latter asked, "And where is the head office?"

"Place Saint-Sulpice, of course!" replied Ringué.

"So much the better, then," added the stranger, "we shall be passing down the Rue Princesse, where I am living, and perhaps one of you gentlemen will be kind enough to call at my house to reassure my wife, who must be terribly uneasy. I ought to have been home at eleven o'clock to-night, but unfortunately the train ran off the rails at Clairvaux, in consequence of the snapping of one of the axles, and we experienced a delay of fully three hours; thank goodness, however, there were no arms or legs broken!"

"Where do you come from?" asked Ringué.

"From Langres."

"You ought to have said so at once."

"So I would if you had given me time. I happen to be coming along quietly, you pounce upon me unawares, you collar me in order to take me straight away to the police-station. If you think a man can account for everything when he is treated like that——"

"Quite so! But you happen to be prowling about at unreasonable hours, carrying parcels—why didn't you take a cab with such a load?"

"There you are! I should like to have found one at the station; but the drivers no doubt had their own reasons to get away—besides, that's natural enough, with such cold weather."

"And didn't you meet one coming along?"

"I only met policemen, and they all did like you. This is the third time I am obliged to come to an explanation with them. When the streets are silent of a night I don't mind coming across you, but what surprises me is to find you all so suspicious. What change has taken place in Paris since my departure a fortnight ago? Is there fear of a disturbance?"

"By no means."

"Something unusual, however, must be in the wind for you to suspect respectable citizens in this manner. The Government is wrong in acting thus."

Ringué began to think that this individual, who at the

outset could not be made to speak, was becoming singularly loquacious, and his mistrust increased.

"You mentioned just now that you hail from Langres?" asked Champy. "I am astonished at that, for yours is not the snuffling and drawling twang of those parts."

"I did not tell you that I hailed from Langres, but simply that I have just come from that place: a man need not be born in a place for him to have business there. My wife has relations at Langres, and I have been obliged to go there to see about things; and you can fancy that these must have been matters of importance to induce a chilly fellow like myself to undertake such a journey in the winter. Seventy-five leagues in a third-class carriage—to say nothing of stoppages—is not so very agreeable!"

"What's that you have on your shoulders?" asked Ringué, whose suspicions were not yet lulled.

"It's only an old rug which Aunt Lisie gave me to keep the cold out of my feet and knees. Railway companies don't seem to think much about heating third-class carriages—foot-warmers, I suppose, are not meant for poor people."

"All in good time perhaps—but this parcel tied up in a black cloth, which you have got under your arm, what does it contain?"

"Two splendid hams—good uns, I can tell you!—just feel how firm they are—and as for the smell of them—why it would make a dying man eat," added the stranger, with a slight chuckle, whilst depositing the parcel on the pavement.

The officials noticed a label on the black cloth bearing the words: "*Eastern Railway Company.—Goods Office: Langres. Destination: Paris.*"

At sight of this, Ringué's suspicions vanished. By way of form, however, he just felt the hams, whilst Champy examined the contents of the basket, in which he found a pot of honey, clarified butter, chestnuts, sugarplums, and gingerbread, which he recognised as being the produce of the town of Langres and its neighbourhood.

"That will do, you may go," said Ringué, completely satisfied.

"Thanks! I must say, however, that another delay would

have been uncommonly disagreeable to me." Then, in a free-and-easy tone, he added, "You ought to know, gentlemen, I am not quite a stranger to you. I render many a little service to some of your big-pots. I have dealings with Messrs. D— M— N—."

The last name he uttered particularly struck Ringué, who, in a knowing way, added: "Right! I see—I quite understand—you are a political agent; that's a kettle of fish which doesn't concern us. Good-bye! Christmas-eve is close upon us—you will be able to do fitting honour to it with your hams."

"Good-night," replied the stranger, picking up his parcels and going down the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours.

At this moment, the clock at the Institute struck a quarter past two. As soon as he had lost sight of the two constables, the night-wanderer, hugging the walls, hurried apace, looking round from time to time, to make sure that he was not being followed. He soon entered the Rue du Four, and, having reached the Rue Princesse, he suddenly disappeared in a recess kept private by a railing placed in front of a house built back from the line of the street. For a moment he remained there immovable, listening and watching intently. Neither hearing nor seeing anyone in the immediate vicinity, he quickly entered the Rue Princesse, in which he was supposed to live, and stopped opposite the door of an old house, which has since been rebuilt. Instead of feeling for handle or bellpull, he pressed his finger on an iron spring, hidden in a groove. A faint click was heard, and the house-door immediately gave admittance.

The unknown entered and gently pushed the door to—without, however, wholly closing it; then, like a man knowing his way about the house, he went along a narrow dark passage and soon found himself in a small square yard. Not seeing any light burning in the windows looking on to this yard, he drew near to a well, situated in the right-hand corner, and put down his basket, as well as the parcel tied up in the black cloth; then he silently raised the hinged lid which covered the top of the well. The single bucket used for drawing up the water was in its usual place, hanging by the handle to a long rusty nail,

bent and fixed in the side of the wall which formed a niche. The strange personage made sure that there was no kind of obstacle in the opening of the well; then firmly fastening to his right-hand the end of a string rolled round the black parcel, he raised the latter over the orifice and lowered it into space. The suspicious packet disappeared, turning rapidly round and round in proportion as the string was unwound, and in a few moments it reached the surface of the water, in which it noiselessly sank. Thus suddenly disturbed, the water produced a gentle ripple, a slight splash, and that was all. The man now hauled up the string, rolling it round his hand, and placed it in his basket, the two handles of which he passed over his left-arm; then, after having once more looked up at the windows, which were still in perfect darkness, he returned the same way he had come, and left the house after shutting the door behind him.

Once in the street, he attempted a smile, whilst murmuring: "The hams are in a cool place; they can bide till Christmas. Nevertheless, the sudden appearance of those two police-spies made my flesh creep. I really thought I had more nerve. Being summoned in that sudden fashion nearly caused me to betray myself. I must, in future, have more control over myself."

The clock of the Mairie, in the Place Saint-Sulpice, struck in the silence of the night.

"Half-past two!" said the mysterious personage to himself. "I may return by way of the Carrefour de Buci. I shan't meet the same policemen there now. They have been relieved. I know the rotation of the A, B, C divisions."

And, indeed, Ringué and Champy had returned to the station-house in accordance with the regulations of the service. The unknown now crossed the Carrefour at an easy pace, went along the Rue Mazarine, and then entered the house numbered 47. It was there that he lived. The house had no doorkeeper; the few lodgers had each a latch-key, and could come and go at their convenience without being observed. He slowly ascended the staircase, and, on reaching the third floor, pushed open a door and entered a room, feebly lit by a lamp, which, for the want of oil, was on the point of dying out. It still, however, shed sufficient

light to enable him, on looking at himself in a glass standing on a chest of drawers, to notice the remarkable change in his features.

"How pale I am," he said. "It's from fatigue and cold—I've got the shivers—it's extraordinary— This is the first time I have ever felt fear, and yet what have I got to be afraid of? My task is now over. I have just been my last journey—all is finished and well finished! Nobody will ever know— Well, let's take a few hours' rest," he added, commencing to undress, "and my paleness will disappear. To-day I must be elegant and amiable in the eyes of her who will soon by my wife. I have sown—the harvest is ripe—all I have to do is to gather in the crop."

And then he turned down the dying lamp and slid between the sheets of his bed.

* * * * * *

At eight o'clock in the morning, the officer in charge received the report for the night, worded in this way:—

CITY POLICE. Paris, *December* 22, 1868.
VI[th] ARRONDISSEMENT.

DISTRICT OF LA MONNAIE.
Letter A

Christine Station.

General Supervision from midnight to seven a.m.

"No theft to report.

"Arrest of two vagabonds in the closets on the embankment of the Quai des Grands-Augustins.

"Charged three chemists' assistants for scandalous behaviour, and assaulting a girl and two professional prostitutes.

"In the lock-up, a woman found lying dead-drunk in the Rue Dauphine.

"Nothing particular to report.

"The Second-Corporal,
"Crinsip."

As to the individual encountered by Ringué and Champy, there was and could be no question. The statement of the unknown had been accepted by the two policemen as a truthful one ; neither could doubt his assertion—which, after all, was a very possible one—that he was a belated traveller.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR'S HOLIDAYS.—DISCOVERY OF HUMAN REMAINS.

At Christmas and the New Year it is customary for the Prefecture of Police to give authority for a number of things—which are mostly only for sale at this special season —to be sold in the streets, or in booths erected on the foot-pavements. This temporary permission in favour of small dealers and needy working-people necessarily interferes with free circulation in the public thoroughfares; but on the other hand it constitutes a source of trifling revenue for poor families, and for working-men who may be out of employment, and who at this time are permitted to retail in the streets small articles manufactured by themselves.

At this period, the question of New Year's presents, to be given and received, forms the principal subject of conversation in all families: these are red-letter days for charming little ones who as yet know merely the dawn of life, bright with sunny smiles and pleasant thoughts. The pangs of misery are momentarily forgotten by parents, and in every father's thought, in every mother's heart, hope kindles. In all directions, in the streets, on the boulevards, at the crossways, in public places, and on the quays, temporary shops, bright with their glittering wares, are to be found. All kinds of things are sold, all kinds of things are bought; but the chief attractions are children's toys. This extraordinary exhibition includes every description of toy, as well as dolls, Polichinellos, Jacks-in-the-box, Merry-Andrews and other puppets, and furnishes a faithful reflex of the great human masquerade as well as of contemporary politics.

Every class of the social hierarchy mingles in front of these displays of varied and multi-coloured objects: the working-man elbows the well-to-do citizen, the blouse rubs

against the frock-coat, and poor and rich crowd to see and hear. But it is especially round the booths, with noisy brass instruments, that people congregate the most. Like children, with whom they have much in common, the people love noise and hubbub; drums of various kinds, clarionets and brass instruments capable of producing harsh notes, are, and always will be, its favourite toys. At the moment when one year is dying and another is commencing, the labours of the two Chambers are interrupted. Deputies, as well as Senators, are having their holidays, like so many schoolboys. In parliamentary slang, this period of idleness is called "The confectioners' truce." A kind of strike, too, takes place among the criminal classes at this season, for experience has proved that attempts against person and property, diminish in a marked degree at the approach of the Christmas and New Year's holidays.

Paris is then very animated—nay, even turbulent. It wakes up, eats, drinks, laughs, sings, amuses itself, and yet works. The period is a reassuring one for the Government. But the money hastily earned by a multitude of tolerated small traders, is quickly spent, and everyone then returns to his usual occupations and preoccupations; and, with the falling-off of this street-trade, beggars, vagabonds, and thieves, resume their former exploits.

During the Christmas and New Year's holidays, people had for the moment forgotten the doings of the gang of housebreakers which had so greatly excited the population by the multiplicity of its depredations. Its mode of proceeding clearly pointed to the existence of a band served by skilful informers, and knowing how to destroy all traces, since up to the present it had been impossible to lay hands on any of its members. The reports sent every day to the city police by the officials of the twenty Arrondissements, only made mention of trifling thefts; and the trading classes, partly reassured, profited by the occasion of the New Year to testify to the representatives of order and authority their complete satisfaction. But this satisfaction was only of short duration, for the newspapers soon announced other burglaries committed at various jewellers.

To the uneasiness caused by this renewal of the exploits of the famous gang, was now added the anxiety arising from

painful discoveries simultaneously made in various parts of the capital. At first, there was found in a drain in the Rue Jacob, a bone, the longest of those belonging to the human skeleton—in other words, the femoral, or thigh bone. To this portion of a corpse there still hung a piece of flesh retaining the rotula, vulgarly called the knee-cap. On the following days, the police authorities of the Notre-Dame, Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, Les Invalides, Grenelle, Bercy, Porte-Saint-Martin, and Pont-de-Flandres districts successively forwarded to the Morgue pieces of human flesh, which had been fished out of the Seine and the Saint-Martin canal, chiefly close to the floating laundries. These cadaverous remains irregular in shape, measured mostly about six inches across, and hardly weighed more than a couple of pounds. Their soft consistency seemed to point to a sojourn of three weeks in the water. A single portion of greenish flesh was found tied up in a piece of blue paper, of the kind used by painters to cover the inner walls of cupboards. This was, however, only a shadowy clue. Owing, too, to these pieces of flesh being in a far-advanced stage of putrefaction, it was hardly possible to define the instruments by means of which the cutting-up had been performed.

An inquiry was opened by the Public Prosecutor, who ordered minute investigations to be made in the quarters occupied by the laundry-boats in that portion of the canal, comprised between the Pont du Faubourg du Temple and the slaughterhouses of La Villette. These researches led to the discovery, in the midst of dead dogs and cats, sardine-boxes, and orange-peel, of several other pieces of human flesh; but no clue was found pointing to where they had come from. Being taken charge of at the Morgue, these dreadful remains were the object of careful examination on the part of the legal doctors appointed for this purpose. On collecting them on the dissecting-room table, in order to re-form the body as far as possible, experts proved that great care had been taken to destroy the principal parts, which might have served to establish the identity and sex of the victim. Even the skin seemed to have been removed. It was evident, however, that art had not presided over the cutting-up of the body, which had

been unmethodically mutilated, hacked, and deprived of its bones.

The Registrar of the Morgue called the doctors' attention to the fact that, on the preceding 17th of December, the Commissary of Police of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés district had caused to be deposited in the dead-house a human thigh tied up in a blue jersey bordered with black, and which could only have been in the water a few days. This, the first and largest piece found, and evidently belonging to the same corpse, was joined to the other portions. The authorities recognised that they were face to face with a horrible and mysterious crime, the nature of which, however, could not then be defined. All that could be concluded with certainty up to that time was that the body of an adult, age and sex unknown, had been cut up and dispersed piecemeal in the centre and suburbs of Paris. The police authorities did not remain inactive, but, in spite of the intelligent investigations of the detective department, not the slightest clue was discovered.

The proprietor of a laundry-boat lying at the Quai Valmy close to the Pont de la Rue La Fayette, had made the following deposition :—"A few days before Christmas, whilst going his usual round, at eleven o'clock at night, about his floating establishment, he had noticed on the bank, not far from his boat, a short man, wearing a long overcoat and a tall hat. The proceedings of this individual having struck him as suspicious, he had walked up to him, lantern in hand, and had asked him for an explanation of his presence at that time of night."

The unknown had replied : "You see what I am doing. To-morrow is Sunday, and I am making my arrangements to have a good haul. *I am baiting, old fellow!*" and, dipping his hand into an osier-basket having a double lid opening on either side of the handle, he took out some pieces of flesh, which he threw broadcast into the canal. Knowing from experience the singular crotchets of many amateurs of the floating-cork and ground-line, the proprietor of the laundry-boat had quietly withdrawn, fancying himself in the presence of some maniac fisherman.

On comparing dates, it was found that this incident had

happened on Saturday, the 19th of December—that is to say, two days after the discovery in the Seine, close to the Pont des Saints-Pères, of the thigh wrapped up in the blue jersey. There was a singular coincidence between these two facts, but the eccentricities of fishermen are well known, and it was thought to be not unlikely that the man questioned by the owner of the laundry-boat was a disciple of St. Peter. In this case, one ran the risk of getting on a false scent. Certain favoured police-officials are like so many thoroughbred hounds: set them on to a hare, and you will make it difficult to bring them back to follow up a fox, and the game you wish to run down frequently escapes. Fishermen are generally peaceable and good-tempered folk: they are gentle, silent, and do not wage war with society. No precedent can be found of a fisherman who, out of love for his art, has ventured on cutting up his fellow-man—even though the latter were an envied competitor—in order to throw him by way of bait to entice fish which he might hook. The secrets of fishermen are not always as deep as the water in which they plunge the end of their lines, destined to deceive the inquisitive and mistrusting gaze of the carp or barbel, and it has been recorded that certain hardened amateurs of the craft have not recoiled from the most disgusting manipulations in order to obtain a *miraculous haul.*

Might one not perhaps have to deal with the exploits of some similar fanatic, anxious to become famous by adding some new invention of his own to the number of most taking baits? Everything is possible, and everything happens in life. There are certain contradictory anomalies which are beyond the comprehension of the human intellect, and which will always be the despair of doctors in insanity. For the want, therefore, of ampler details, every kind of hypothesis was permissible. Nevertheless, the inquiry made no kind of headway; justice saw itself compelled to keep a close watch on the case known as that of "*The Mysterious Remains*," whilst awaiting new discoveries, which fortunately were not long in turning up. The crime made quite a stir. The press kept its readers in suspense by sensational articles. A few newspapers, hostile to the Empire, got up quite a cabal against the Government,

in the emphatic denials which they gave to the suggestion of a crime.

"The information set in motion," said they, "is as false as that disseminated by a dishonest financier who is starting a speculation in order to throw public opinion off the scent with reference to certain events crowding together on an already disturbed political horizon."

Other newspapers, in consequence of the decomposed condition of these pieces of human flesh, maintained that they were nothing but anatomical specimens, and cast reflections, in no measured terms, on the behaviour of certain medical students who, as they said, were amusing themselves by playing sorry tricks. By means of short paragraphs, adroitly slipped in, the anti-clerical press on its part, insinuated that the solution of the mystery might be found in a convent.

"A discovery has been made of the disappearance of a young nun," said one of these journals, which her father-confessor had the greatest possible interest in keeping secret. We are, as yet, unable to specify names, but may, for the present, be permitted to observe that the convent where the drama has taken place is not so very far from the Seine, at the spot where it leaves Paris."

The newspapers which pretended to be the best informed, believed fully in the existence of the crime, but they predicted that, in accordance with praiseworthy custom, the police would be found powerless to lay hands on the guilty ones. The drama of "*The Mysterious Remains*" had become the question of the day. People talked of nothing else, and talked about it everywhere. For the orators of public meetings, as well as for the newspapers representing the advanced party, this proved an excellent opportunity to criticise the Imperial policy. In the Salle Molière, in the Rue Saint-Martin, one of these fanatics, accompanying his words with melodramatic gestures, whilst grotesquely burlesquing the actor Mélingue, in the *Tour de Nesles*, exclaimed indignantly:

"Yes, fellow-citizens! The Seine and the Canal Saint-Martin are full of the remains of corpses, and the prisons are overrun with our martyrs! The police squanders its time as well as the money of the ratepayers—that is our money,

fellow citizens!—in locking up the defenders of democracy! Be up and doing, fellow citizens! It is time to put an end to such an infamous Government!"

"Yes! yes! let us put an end to it!" replied the audience in unison while frantically applauding, "we must act and overthrow the tyrant. Let us start!"

And start they did, like so many supers, towards the neighbouring pothouses, where they made a night of it.

The implicated medical students, raised their protest. They proved that if, with a view to study, they had sometimes taken away, hidden beneath their garments, an arm, hand, or foot, for purposes of private dissection, it would be practically impossible for the attendants in the operating-theatre to sell and deliver to the purchasers entire, or even partial, corpses, coming from the medical school or from hospitals.

CHAPTER III.

THE WELL IN THE RUE PRINCESSE.—TWO HUMAN LEGS.—

+ B +..??

OFFICIAL REPORT.

CITY OF PARIS.

PREFECTURE OF POLICE.

1ST DIVISION.

1st Office.

POLICE STATION.

Odéon District.

VIth. Arrondissement.

No.

Presumption of a crime.

Two human legs found in a well in the Rue Princesse.

Appended, a medico-legal report.

In the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, Tuesday, the twenty-sixth day of January, at five o'clock in the evening,

In the presence of us, Macé (Gustave), Commissary of Police of the city of Paris, more especially entrusted with the Odéon district, officer of legal police, assistant to the Public Prosecutor,

Appears constable Ringué (forty years of age), attached to division A of the Sixth Arrondissement, in the district of La Monnaie, at the station-house of the Rue Christine, having his quarters at the Prefecture of Police,

Who makes the following statement:—

"I had just completed my turn on duty which commenced at two o'clock in the afternoon. I was on the point of returning to my private residence in the Rue Montfaucon, when, passing down the Rue Princesse, I was accosted by Monsieur Lampon, an old-established eating-house-keeper in this street, who communicated to me that he had drawn

out of the well, situated in the yard of the house he inhabits at that address and where he carries on his occupation, a human leg, already in a state of putrefaction. Lampon is a friend of mine, and I asked him not to mention his discovery until the authorities were informed of it. He promised me this, and, besides, he has no interest to reveal the circumstance, for he makes use of the water of this well for the requirements of his business. The water, usually clear and pure, had become vitiated. This puzzled him; he spoke about the matter to the woman in charge of the premises—a species of infatuated female going by the name of 'Mother Michel,' in consequence of her affection for cats; but this poor woman, distressed by the disappearance of her favourite Tom, only answered him by incoherent lamentations. Lampon himself will explain to you how he fished this leg out of the well. I am very anxious to be placed at your disposal to follow up this matter, if thought necessary. I have lived in the neighbourhood for a long time, and I know all the inhabitants of the Rue Princesse."

By special letter, we request the chief officer of the Arrondissement to be kind enough to permit constable Ringué, and one of his colleagues in private clothes, to assist us in the various operations and investigations which may be thought necessary.

We then go, accompanied by our private secretary, Monsieur Leroy, to the house in the Rue Princesse, mentioned by Ringué. Entering the dining establishment, at this moment free from customers, we encounter Monsieur Lampon, who conducts us into one of the rooms of his residence, in order to furnish us, away from indiscreet observers, with every necessary explanation relating to the discovery he has just made. On being questioned, this individual informs us that his name is Lampon (Alfred), his age, thirty-five years, his occupation, eating-house-keeper. To this he adds:

"For about a fortnight I have noticed that in drawing water from the well, used by the lodgers as well as by myself, there escaped from the pail during its ascent splashes and drops of water which, in falling to the bottom of the well, produced a singular sound. I had caused

a chemist to analyse the water of this well, which had been acknowledged fresh, clear, and as healthy as rain-water. Its excellent quality fitted it for all domestic purposes. But for some time, I had noticed that, from having been drinkable and wholesome, it was becoming daily more and more unhealthy and nauseous. Wishing to know the cause of this change, I took advantage of the departure of the last guest who lunched here this morning, and I went down into my cellar, where there is an aperture giving one the opportunity of looking more closely into the well, which is a fairly deep one. I lit a candle, and by means of a string lowered it down to the surface of the water, where I discovered a something shiny, which seemed to be floating there. With an iron hook, a kind of fish-hook with several barbs, I succeeded in fishing up a bundle, which became unhooked three successive times and splashed back heavily to the bottom of the well, rising forthwith again to the surface of the water. Finally, at the fourth attempt, I managed to secure it with my hook, and to land it in my cellar. It was a parcel wrapt up in various coverings. As soon as I sought to discover its contents, a disagreeable odour spread about me. My surprise was equal to my terror on beholding a human leg. I forthwith threw it, covers and all, in an empty case which happened to be within reach.

"It is impossible for me to define the various feelings I experienced at that moment. I do not think I am more of a coward than other people, danger has never frightened me ; but, in the silence of this cellar, in the midst of the reflections of the light cast by my candle on those old blackened walls, covered with cobwebs, I fancied for a moment I saw fantastic shadows move round and about me. Perspiration was beading on my brow, and a shiver ran through all my limbs. I left my cellar with the nimbleness of a criminal escaping from the scene of his misdeed, taking care to shut the door behind me, fearful lest that human leg might have a desire to follow. I ascended in all haste the dark and damp steps of the staircase, and did not stop till I reached the small courtyard you see before you. Then only did I freely breathe. I am convinced that, if I had been seen when I was exploring the well and had been caught at the moment

of opening this dreadful parcel, I might have been accused, and even arrested. I could not have said a single word in self-defence. And—would you believe it?—it is only since your coming here that I feel fully reassured.

"I was just dressing with the view of going to give information, when my friend Ringué passed the house, and I requested him to give you notice of my painful discovery. It is now for you, Mr. Commissary, to continue investigations in this cursed well, which, I am afraid, has not as yet said its last word. The landlord of the house is an old friend of my childhood: he lives in the country, and I look after his interests. The house is kept by an old-maid, somewhat deaf, whose mental faculties are considerably on the wane. The landlord and I only keep her out of pity, waiting for an opportunity of placing her in some kind of home. She has lived in the house close upon half-a-century; she has become attached to it, as ivy does to the oak, hoping to die here. She is supposed to have been very intelligent once upon a time; even now she has occasional moments of perfect lucidity, but these are so scarce and so short, that it is impossible to rely on them for the purpose of obtaining any kind of information.

"Her name is Modeste Xora; she hails from the Champagne. I have heard say that she refused all offers of marriage. In her youth she followed the occupation of sempstress; but she has been obliged to give up sewing altogether, in consequence of her failing sight. For about ten years, she has filled, as best she could, the post of doorkeeper. In spite of her unmarried state, she is called 'Mother Michel,' because of her advanced age—for she is seventy—and of her marked predilection for animals, notably cats, which hold the first place in her affections. She always possesses two or three of them.

"Yesterday, I spoke to her about the water in the well, which had so rapidly become bad; her reply was by no means a pleasant one: 'It's Whitey-whitey, my black cat, which has disappeared. Poor Whitey-whitey! That minx of a girl must have made away with it.' I could not imagine what she was alluding to, for there are no girls in the place. Whitey-whitey, was a handsome Angora cat that she doted on. The animal had disappeared. I fancied it

might have fallen, or have been thrown in the well out of spite, and that this was really the cause of the bad condition of the water.

"Last night, I carefully thought out by what means the investigations of which you know the result could best be made. The lodgers, to the number of ten, are all quiet sort of people; old as well as new, they are all known to Mother Michel. If one or other of them is not directly or indirectly implicated in this painful affair, it is certain that the person who entered the place, in order to throw down the well the leg which I have since fished up, must have known of its existence and the means of getting in during the night, without disturbing anyone. The house-door is constantly kept closed, and any stranger wishing to enter, must ring a bell, and the person in charge then pulls the door-string. As regards the lodgers, in the woodwork of one of the door-leaves there is hidden an iron knob, which only needs pressing to set a spring in motion, and drive back the catch. This is very convenient for the lodgers as well as for the doorkeeper, whose night's rest need not then be disturbed. This secret is a very simple one; but still people have to know of it."

His statement finished, Lampon moves in the direction of the house-door. The two principal leaves of this door, which was formerly a carriage-entrance, have long since been made fast, but a panel opened in the right-leaf gives the lodgers or other persons admittance into the house. Lampon, several times, shows us the secret way of opening the door, and calls attention to the string connected with the bell hanging in the doorkeeper's lodge; then, leading the way along a passage abutting on a small square court-yard, he points out the well to us.

Quite a legendary, a more than centenarian well, in excellent preservation! Above the level ground there rises a curb, hewn out of a single block of stone fixed against the wall of the next house. The opening of the well is three feet ten inches in diameter; the depth is about sixty-five feet; the pulley, serving to raise and lower the only bucket by which water is drawn, is suspended from an iron frame-work fixed into the wall.

Opening a door, we perceive some steps leading to the

cellars, and descend this awkwardly-constructed staircase. Lampon, provided with a hand-lamp, stops at the door of his cellar, which, as he informs us, is the largest in the house. The door is closed, but the key is in the lock. We enter, and, by help of the light cast by Lampon's lamp and a lighted candle which our secretary is carrying, we observe that it is filled with full and empty casks, bottles, and cases. A portion of the vaulted roof is covered with long thick cobwebs, and a strong, cadaverous odour is observable. Lampon points to a case standing on the ground, saying: "The leg is there!"

On the lid of the case the words "Valentia oranges" are marked in black capitals. The lid having been removed, we discover, at the bottom of this case, a shapeless something, consisting of remnants of string and rags and a fragment of flesh emitting a putrid smell. Looking more carefully, we perceive a human leg, the flesh being separated from the *tibia* like the bark of an old apple-tree. Lampon goes on to observe that when he fished the parcel, in which he expected to find the doorkeeper's cat, out of the well, not wishing to touch the stuff (*sic*), he confined himself to cutting with his knife—and that in every direction—the covering which his improvised harpoon had already considerably damaged. He cannot, therefore, give a precise description of the way in which the parcel was tied at the moment of his gaining possession of it.

Through the window communicating between the cellar and the inside of the well, we examine the latter, which is lighted by a lantern lowered close to the surface of the water. An object, the nature of which we cannot discover, glitters and shines. Perhaps this is merely the effect of the reflection caused by the light. In order to make quite sure, however, the lantern is drawn up again and Lampon fastens a full bottle beneath in such a manner that it shall hang some eighteen inches lower down, and serve as a plummet.

Lantern and bottle are now lowered into the well. The bottle rests upright on a moving object having a silvery sheen; this object gradually sinks into the water. By a see-saw movement it gets free from the bottle, and immediately rises again to the surface. There is consequently

nothing in the shape of delusive reflection, and that which appears to be a bundle really exists.

We then proceed to make arrangements for withdrawing it from the water without injuring it in any way. Rejecting the four-barbed hook commonly called a "spider," and which Lampon had already made use of, we make some experimental attempts with the pail used for drawing up the water. We find this recipient too narrow, and the handle also prevents it from becoming fixed beneath the object aimed at. Some other combination has to be tried. Lampon now produces a large double-handled copper pan, used for making jams. We fasten it by one of the handles to the end of the well-rope. We now lower this pan from the top of the well, until it is level with the opening made in Lampon's cellar, and we instruct Leroy, our secretary, to keep hold of the rope; then going down to the eating-house-keeper's cellar again, and passing our arms through the aperture, we pull the copper pan towards us by the other handle, to which we fix a strong cord. Our secretary allows the rope to work slowly off the pulley; we on our part gently lower the cord in our hands. The vessel now touches the surface of the water, fills, and sinks after forcing aside and descending beneath the bundle which blocked the way. It rests at the bottom of the well whilst the object we wish to get hold of once more rises to the surface. But the lantern not giving us sufficient light to guide us effectually, several candles are lit and suspended here and there along the sides of the well.

Combining our movements with those of Leroy, the pan is gradually raised, and the parcel, caught just below the middle, lies of its own accord at the bottom of the vessel. It is thus secured without suffering the slightest damage. Its ascent continues until it becomes level with the eye. The cord we hold is now fastened to a nail in such a manner as to keep the pan within convenient reach, and the contents, after being removed, are deposited on a plank placed ready for the purpose.

We now set about examining the parcel. It is eighteen inches long by nine inches broad. Some new thin string, the ends of which are joined by what is called a "rose-knot," is wound round it. We untie this string; no kind of damage has been done to the wrap, consisting of a piece

of black glazed calico, the end-flaps of which are knotted together, allowing pieces of the stuff to hang down like a rabbit's ears; the middle of the bundle is sewn together with black thread. The knots having been unfastened, the thread having been pulled out, we remove the calico, which, when fully unfolded, measures a square yard. Two sides of it are hemmed. Beneath this first wrap appears a second one, consisting of the leg of a pair of corded iron-grey cloth trousers. The portion of the leg nearest to the waist has been cut off, evidently to remove the buttons bearing the manufacturer's name, or indicating some tailor's trade-mark. These trousers seem to have been made for a shortish individual.

Inside this second covering we find a human leg, like the one fished up by Lampon. The calf is not very developed, but at first sight it is impossible to say whether the limb belongs to a man or to a woman. The leg, however, has still a stocking on, the length of which proves that it may have been fastened by means of a garter above the knee, at the extremity of the thigh. This brown cotton stocking has had a few inches cut off at its upper end, doubtless with the object of destroying some kind of mark. A very slight difference in the material, indicates that the upper end of a woollen sock has been joined to the lower extremity of the leg of a stocking. This portion of a sock bears a mark half worn away, yet sufficiently distinct, however, to be recognised; it consists of the letter B between two crosses:—

+ B +.

No pins have been used to fasten the bundle. Every join has been secured by sewing. We forthwith send for two medical men to examine these human remains; and, whilst waiting for these gentlemen, we make arrangements in order to determine if anything else of a suspicious character remains at the bottom of the well. For this purpose, we forward, by the intermediary of constable Ringué, to the officer in charge of the fire-brigade of the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, the following requisition:—

"We, Commissary of Police of the Odéon district:

"Considering that two human legs have just been dis-

covered in the well of a house situated in the Rue Princesse;

"Also, that these remains have in no respect the nature of anatomical specimens used in anatomical and surgical schools, or in one of the Paris hospitals;

"That there is presumption of crime:

"Beg, and request if needful, the officer in charge of the fire-brigade to have the goodness to place at our disposal a sufficient number of men and the requisite materials to set about sounding and emptying the aforesaid well;

"We to take possession of all effects, papers, and objects which may be discovered therein.

"Given at Paris, the 26th day of January, 1869.

"The Commissary of Police,

"G. MACÉ."

Constable Champy, assistant to his colleague Ringué, announces the arrival of two medical men, who have for a long time been attached to the force. We have the two legs, that had been fished out of the well, taken from the cellar to the courtyard, where they are deposited on a cask, and the medical gentlemen commence their examination. They agree that these two legs have been neatly severed above the knee by means of a butcher's knife, used by a skilled hand; but the state of decomposition in which the limbs are does not permit them to determine very precisely, at the moment, how long they have been in the water, or what the sex of the individual may have been.

We insist upon being definitely informed respecting these two points, as indispensable for the opening of the inquiry. Once more these gentlemen make their examination, and, having done so with the greatest care, conclude:

That the time the limbs have been in the well may be computed at a month;

That these two legs seem to be those of a female.

The medico-legal report is drawn up to this effect, and, in accordance with the requirements of the law, is sworn to and deposited in our hands. We thereupon forward these human remains to the Morgue, accompanied with the following instructions:

"We, Commissary of Police,

"Request the Registrar of the Morgue to receive and keep in the best possible state of preservation, compatible with the means at his disposal,

"Two human legs covered with woman's stockings, which have been fished up this day, between three and five o'clock in the afternoon, out of the well of a house situated in the Rue Princesse.

"We likewise request him to take charge of, get dried and disinfected, the string, wraps, and cloth, which enveloped these mortal remains, as well as the stocking marked + B +, the whole to be eventually placed under seal, with explanatory label, in order to be at the disposal of justice.

"Given at Paris, the 26th day of January, 1869.

"The Commissary of Police,

"G. MACÉ."

Sub-lieutenant Zetlu, of the fire-brigade, now arrives to place himself at our disposal, with a detachment consisting of a sergeant, a corporal, and seven men. They forthwith set to work. Corporal Théma, wearing the apparatus ordinarily used for the purpose, goes down the well, and, after an examination which has lasted a few minutes, has himself drawn up again without having made any kind of discovery. Each fireman in his turn explores the well, but their investigations likewise remain fruitless. All are of opinion that there is at least a depth of six feet of water, and that a minute inspection is impossible till the well shall have been drained. Their suction-pump is now made use of and worked with the utmost activity; but, after having been employed for three hours, it is found that this pump is powerless to obtain the required result. Lieutenant Zetlu consequently withdraws with his staff, leaving only one fireman in charge.

Thereupon, we immediately request by letter the manager of the Richer Company to place at our disposal a body of his men, forwarding at the same time, to the Public Prosecutor and the Prefect of Police, a short report of the preceding events. At eleven o'clock at night, a squad of men from the Richer Company arrives, as requested. Their pump is forthwith set to work without delay, and at midnight the well is empty. The fireman left behind in charge goes

down it, examines it, looks about, moves the ooze, and finally requests to be drawn up again, declaring he has discovered nothing.

We thereupon order constables Ringué and Champy to keep on the watch within the house in order to take notice, with a view to ulterior report, of any incident which might occur in the course of the night.

We then withdraw, after having closed the present report, to which we annex the medico-legal report, in order that the whole may be forthwith sent to the private residence of the Public Prosecutor.

The Commissary of Police,

G. Macé.

CHAPTER IV.

JUSTICE AND POLICE.

HAVING already held an official position in the Tenth Arrondissement, I had just been appointed Commissary of Police and attached to the Odéon district. This was the first time I had acted in the capacity of an officer belonging to the judiciary police, in a case of such exceptional gravity. To make use of a vulgar expression, "things looked very blue," and I foresaw the heavy and laborious task I was about to undertake, to explain the presence of those two human legs in the well in the Rue Princesse. It would have been easy enough for me to decline following up this inquiry, and to induce the Public Prosecutor to depute it to one of my colleagues, who was not only my senior in the service, but who could boast of more experience than myself. A secret intuition, however, told me that I should arrive at a satisfactory result. I was, therefore, fully determined to obtain permission from the legal authorities to proceed personally with the continuation of the investigation that I had just commenced.

At one o'clock in the morning, on quitting the house in the Rue Princesse, where I left constables Ringué and Champy permanently in charge, I went straight to my office. By one of those singular administrative paradoxes, the police offices happened to lie outside my special district—being situated at No. 53, Rue d'Assas, in the Notre-Dame-des-Champs district—so that both my staff as well as myself were under the supervision of one of my colleagues. This state of things was very inconvenient for the business that I had to transact, and more especially for those under my jurisdiction, who were thereby put to considerable loss of time, which interfered seriously with their affairs. During the summer, they were able to shorten their road by going through the Jardin du Luxembourg; but, in winter, they

were obliged to take a long and unpleasant round. This undesirable condition of things has since been modified.

My own room, being a continuation of the outer offices connected with it, was situated on the ground floor: it was lighted by a double glass-door opening on to a small garden, which was in direct communication with the Rue Bonaparte, facing the gates of the Jardin du Luxembourg. I therefore had two ways of gaining admittance: the first, the principal one and accessible to the public, opened on to the Rue d'Assas; the second, my own private one, on to the Rue Bonaparte. The offices being closed on my return from the Rue Princesse, I entered my room by the private door; Monsieur Leroy accompanied me.

Before forwarding my official report to the Public Prosecutor, I wrote down in all haste—dictating at the same time to my secretary the counterpart to be sent to the Prefect of Police—another special report, for the purpose of this being attached to the account of my proceedings. I therein stated my first impressions, as well as my personal reflections, matters purely hypothetical, and which would have been out of place in an official report. The official report, which is a legal document in the fullest sense of the word, should contain nothing but precise facts, witnessed and authenticated, and about which no kind of doubt can be entertained. Here are, in substance, the contents of this supplementary report:—

"The human limbs, drawn up from the well in the Rue Princesse, are not anatomical specimens; they seem to have belonged to a person of the female sex, and were separately tied up in a piece of black glazed calico, measuring a square yard, the extremities of which were fastened in knots, allowing the ends of the material to hang down like the ears of a rabbit, as with large bales of merchandise. This method of wrapping and tying parcels by double fastenings, top and bottom, is specially in use among tailors and sempstresses, but more particularly among the former; and, from the mode in which these knots have been tied, it seems to me that we are justified in believing that a tailor had to do with them; for sempstresses have a way of joining the four ends of their wrappers in the shape of a cross, when doing up goods

to deliver to their customers. The coverings, therefore, which enveloped the legs seem to me to have been those of a journeyman tailor.

"The proprietors of first-class establishments use silken wrappers, tailors of an inferior position, "satin-de-Chine," while journeymen, working at home, use black glazed calico, because of its trifling cost. I purpose, therefore, to direct my search among the latter. In the house in the Rue Princesse there are neither sempstresses nor tailors. All the lodgers are known to be respectable, and I do not think that the guilty person is to be found amongst them. The woman in charge is aged and somewhat crazy; there is nothing to be got from her for the time being. Monsieur Lampon's establishment is respectably conducted. His usual customers are journeymen printers and work-people employed by dealers in religious articles. The closets of the place can only be reached through the room at the back of the shop, there being none in the yard.

"On one of the victim's stockings there exists a mark which, later on, may serve as a clue; it is a letter placed between two crosses:—

+ B +.

"The mark has nothing in common with those usually made by laundresses to identify the linen entrusted to their care. For the present, I have no more serious data. I am as yet in the vast field of conjecture."

At the conclusion of the report intended for the Prefect of Police, I requested him to be good enough to give instructions for me to have access to all documents relating to individuals who had disappeared during the previous six months, and whose names commenced with the letter B. My reports being now signed and closed, I ordered a constable, whom I had taken from the police-station of the Place Saint-Sulpice, to convey them, as well as my official report, to their addresses; then, after having examined in the office-books the complaints and claims which had been made in the course of the evening, and having likewise taken cognisance of the accidents reported during my absence, I signed a few important letters, and finally, at

two o'clock in the morning, my secretary and I left the premises, and went each to his own home.

At that time I was living in the Rue Vavin, and I had no great way to go to reach there. In spite of the day's fatigue, it was impossible for me to get a wink of sleep that night. This mysterious affair kept me wide awake. It was all very well for me to cudgel my brains: I could not for the life of me succeed in discovering the guiding thread, which was to steer me through the shoals of this mystery. The next morning at eight, my usual hour, I reached the office.

The previous evening, I had authorised Lampon to keep his establishment open all night, in order to facilitate the watch of constables Ringué and Champy, whom I had left there, with instructions to be at the office the moment it opened. On entering my private room, I found they had already arrived, and I heard them relating to the messenger the incidents of the previous night.

"The report of that lugubrious discovery," said Ringué, "was soon all over the neighbourhood, and, after the Commissary's departure, my friend's place became invaded by a crowd eager for news. Whilst drinking, each man had his say. All sorts of tales went round; but not a single surmise was made which it was worth one's while to remember. Everybody—without ever having known her, be it said—pitied the unfortunate woman, the victim of some snare, whose legs had been cut off, and general opinion was hostile to the police who would no more discover the name of the victim than that of the murderer. The place was full all night long, and Lampon must have netted big takings. The festivities of the 15th of August and New Year's Day have never brought him such a windfall.

"Would you believe it?" Ringué went on to say, "that that booby Lampon has positively got rid of the stewpan he lent us to fish up the second leg with. The sight of the utensil in his kitchen was too much for him. It was useless for me to preach to him that, if once well scoured out, it would be as good as if new from the maker—no, he wouldn't hear a single word. In his opinion, a pan which had been taken from the fire to fish up pieces of human flesh out of a well, should no longer be used for

making jam. Consequently, this morning, as soon as it was light, he went out to swap it for another one at Delzangle's, the coppersmith in the Rue du Gindre."

"Your friend seems in no end of a funk," remarked Champy.

"Not he," replied Ringué, "his disposition is an excellent one, always ready to do a good turn; but the man is singularly sensitive."

I called the two policemen; they came and stood like soldiers without their arms, erect and immovable. Ringué informed me that the doorkeeper, Mademoiselle Xoru, whom he had just seen, was still more taciturn and incoherent than the evening before. To every question put to her, she replied by laments in connexion with "Whitey-whitey, all black," her lost cat.

"I don't think anything is to be got out of the old girl," concluded the officer.

"That is not my opinion," observed Champy. "Like myself, she comes from the Champagne country, and, assuming that she left the neighbourhood not too long ago, I might perhaps, as a fellow-countryman of hers, draw her out a bit by reminding her of this and that in those parts. I am quite sure that people never forget their birthplace, however crazy they may be. Besides, I have an idea which has haunted me all night."

"You have stuck to it pretty closely, for fear of its being taken away, I suppose?" said Ringué. "Well, out with it, now, before the commissary."

"Here it is:—You remember the man with the hams who came from Langres, and whom you wanted to take to the station-house, one night when we were on duty in the Carrefour de Buci?"

"Yes, and what of it?"

"What of it—what of it? I hardly know myself, but somehow—well, I can't help thinking of the little fellow!"

"And what is it you think about him?"

"He said he lived in the Rue Princesse: suppose he were Mother Michel's husband?"

"Why, she's a spinster!"

"Her lover, then?"

"She is more than seventy, man!"

"Her son, perhaps?"

"Grandson, maybe! No, no, friend Champy, you are just going a bit too far. You are young, you are energetic and mean well, but what you want is experience. Go and see Mother Michel, as one of her countrymen. Go and make love to her if you like, but, mind you, *nothing rash*; be prudent, especially in what you say to her."

Champy hung his head, he was overcome but not convinced. As for myself, I had silently listened to this picturesque, graceful dialogue, and without exactly knowing why I had been struck by the words: "*Carrefour de Buci, one night—Rue Princesse—hams—little fellow*"—all this now rushed through my head, as Champy would have said, and I promised myself to ask the two constables later on to give me the details of the incident in question.

Precisely at noon, I was at the Palais de Justice, and sent in my card to Monsieur Desarnauts, at that time Public Prosecutor. A moment afterwards I was ushered into his study. This official, decorated, wearing a white tie, solemn in word and bearing, received me standing.

"I have here," he said, "the official and private reports you forwarded me last night. This affair is a grave—a very grave one; it seems to me to be bristling with difficulties, I do not say that they are insurmountable, but still they are out of the common. In all this, the unknown plays the principal part. I coincide in the opinions expressed in your report, and which, through prudence, you have been quite right in keeping out of the official document; yes, the two legs certainly belonged to the human body, remnants of which have been found here and there during the last month. I am going to intrust the investigation to Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, the examining magistrate; go and see him and come to an understanding with him as to how the inquiry shall be conducted, and keep me well informed, either by calling here or by writing to me."

Monsieur Desarnauts wrote down a few words on the blank portion of a printed form, which he drew from a portfolio, and handed to me, with my official report, a document worded as follows:—

"The Public Prosecutor to the Court of First Instance, sitting at Paris.

"Considering the documents hereto appended, showing against

Unknown,

Suspicion of murder,

"Considering articles 47 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and 295 and following of the Penal Code,

"Requests Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, examining magistrate, to inquire into the matter in accordance with the law..

"Given at our office the 27th day of January, 1869.

"DESARNAUTS."

Provided with this document, which was to accredit me to the examining magistrate, I first went to Monsieur Larousse, chief secretary to the Public Prosecutor's office, to have the documents collated and entered. This functionary, whose kindliness was proverbial, received me with his usual courtesy, and, after having the papers which I presented to him registered, he placed them in a large portfolio of stout grey paper, on the outside of which was printed the following formula, which he filled up with such particulars as could then be given :—

M. DOUET D'ARCQ. —M.	
No. of the Examining Magistrate:	
Public Prosecutor's Office of the Court of First Instance.	
No. of Registry of the Court:	No. of Record Office: ......
ODEON DISTRICT Date of the complaint: January 26th, 1869.	
REMARKS. M.......... NO. P.P. M..........	X.......... *against* Unknown.
Presumption of Murder.	Proofs of guilt:
CHARGES. Preliminary charge: January 27th, 1869. Final charge: .... 186..	Sentence pronounced: .... 186..

On receiving this large portfolio I felt my heart beat violently; I held in my hands the brief of *My First Crime,* the basis of an important criminal investigation. I at once called upon the magistrate referred to. Prior to this I had had no opportunity of coming into contact with Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, but I knew his reputation, which was that of a man of superior intellect, and also of a gentleman. It was to this able and clear-minded official that

the responsibility was generally entrusted of unravelling delicate cases and mysterious dramas. I felt somewhat nettled at the thought that he might possibly appoint one of my colleagues to follow up the affair. I feared lest my youth might not inspire a shrewd and clever magistrate, such as he was, with sufficient confidence, and I resolved to do my best to produce a favourable impression upon him. I timidly knocked at the door of his office, which was numbered 14.

"Come in," replied a grave voice from within.

I turned the handle. Monsieur D'Arcq had just finished the examination of an individual charged with bigamy.

"That will do," he said to the gendarmes; "you can take the defendant away."

The nature of the documents in my hand was sufficient to explain my status, With a bow I introduced myself. Monsieur D'Arcq answered with a bow full of courtesy, and, taking my portfolio, pointed to a chair. He read both of my reports with the greatest attention, and then cast an inquiring look on me.

I thereupon communicated to him my impressions and special observations with reference to the matter which had brought me thither—things that would have been out of place in a report. As I spoke I saw the magistrate's face brighten little by little. My explanation at an end, Monsieur Douet d'Arcq submitted me to a species of cross-examination.

"How long have you been appointed Commissary of Police?"

"About a year, sir."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-three."

"You are very young to have charge of such a district as that of the Odéon. You have succeeded a man who enjoyed a most favourable reputation. I mean Monsieur Monvalle. I often used to meet him at the *soirées* of the Senate. He had the confidence of the highest legal authorities, and Monsieur Troplong used to speak of him in the most flattering terms. He was a very excellent commissary, as well as a distinguished numismatist; his collection of medals is a very curious one."

"I am deeply sensible of my predecessor's value and up-

rightness from a professional point of view," I replied, "and I am doing my utmost to follow in his footsteps."

"Your district is not without its dangers. The students are troublesome, even turbulent; well, they do to some extent what all of us have done at their time of life, but just now they happen to be particularly obstreperous, and it is necessary to use a good deal of caution and tact with them."

"I am fully alive, sir, to the difficulties of my position, and I do my best to prove equal to the situation. My superiors, Monsieur Nusse, Chief of the City Police, and Monsieur Marseille, Controller-General, whose private secretary I was once upon a time, recommended me to the Prefect of Police to succeed Monsieur Monvalle in the Odéon district. It was from them that I learnt to be firm and kind at the same time; and this, I am of opinion, is what is required to manage students. I am young, I admit, but I believe that I have already acquired the necessary experience. I entered the service when I was seventeen years of age; I have mounted the different rungs of the administrative hierarchy slowly, and step by step. If I happen to be at this time Commissary of Police of the Odéon district, I owe it to my industry and to the support of the distinguished officials under whose orders I won my spurs."

"A man," said Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, "may have zealously and intelligently performed the duties of Commissary's secretary and yet not possess all the necessary qualifications for the appointment itself, which requires that he should be the close auxiliary of the Public Prosecutor and the examining magistrate."

"I think as you do, sir: an excellent secretary may turn out only an indifferent Commissary of Police. The secretary merely assists in the despatch of legal and administrative business; providing he possesses a certain amount of tact and a fair share of intelligence, he may even give a relative kind of satisfaction to the public in his chief's absence; to do this he does not stand in need of the judgment, shrewdness, and spirit of penetration and decision without which the Commissary of Police would be unable worthily to perform his functions in difficult circumstances. Such

qualities, I am of opinion, may develop themselves by practice, but they can scarcely be acquired; no, they must be inborn and instinctive. However intelligent a man may be, if he possesses no vocation, no gift in the shape of police-like scent and instinct, no love for the mysterious stimulated by experience in the craft, he can be nothing more than a mediocrity in matters of the kind. During his first year of office, a Paris Commissary of Police must show what he is capable of doing, and prove that he possesses intelligence, perseverance, and prudence—in a word, every desirable attribute to successfully conduct cases entrusted to his care."

"I wish with all my heart," replied Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, "that the matter which brings you here may afford you the opportunity of showing that you possess the qualities you refer to; but yet, you must agree with me that, in spite of all your good will, if chance does not come a little to our assistance, we shall be under the painful necessity of pigeon-holing the documents relating to the affair."

"Let us then hope, sir, that chance, backed up by our energy, will be in our favour."

"To business then," concluded Monsieur Douet d'Arcq. "The date of the disappearance of the individual whose remains have been found in various places, is as unknown to us as his name, sex, and age; we are also unacquainted with the locality where he was dismembered. The first thing to be done is to reconstruct this human body, to give it life and make it speak as it were. Are we face to face with the result of revenge, an unpremeditated murder, or a deliberate assassination? Carnival-time is upon us, the period of masked balls, and it is possible that the leg of the trousers, in which one of the human limbs found in the well was clad, may have been worn either by a man or by a woman. That therefore furnishes no positive indication."

"I do not consider that it does; still, it may prove to be of use at any given moment."

Monsieur Douet d'Arcq shook his head. "Everything is mysterious in this case; all we can do at present is to surmise. You persist then in asking me to impose upon you the responsibility of shedding light upon this chaotic darkness?"

"That, sir, is my most anxious wish, for I do not despair of arriving at some kind of result before long. But something tells me that this case, full of puzzles and mysteries, will never go for trial."

"You have, then, something to go upon?"

"Nothing whatever, sir."

"Then I do not understand you."

"It seems to me that some unforeseen event will hasten the solution."

"Perhaps you are a seer?" remarked Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, with a touch of sceptical irony.

"By no means, sir, I am neither a seer nor a believer in supernatural things, I speak as it were instinctively. Favour me with your confidence; the matter on hand is a grave one, and I am in hopes that the coming month will not have passed without some kind of solution of it."

"Very well then, I will give you the necessary powers," said Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, drawing from the pigeon-holes placed close to his writing-table, a printed form, which he handed to his clerk.

He then dictated as follows:—

WARRANT OF INQUIRY.

We, Douet d'Arcq, Examining Magistrate of the Court of First Instance, of the Department of the Seine,

Considering the proceedings commenced against a person unknown;

Considering that two human legs have been found in the well of a house situated in the Rue Princesse;

That these are now lying at the Morgue in order that they may there be subjected to the examination of Doctor Tardieu, specially commissioned by us to that effect;

That they seem to belong to the other human remains lately recovered from the Seine and the Canal Saint-Martin;

That it is necessary to proceed to active investigations,

Do hereby empower Monsieur Macé, Commissary of Police, to continue the inquiry commenced by him; to proceed to every necessary investigation and search, with a view to discovering the identity of the victim, and of the murderer or murderers; to examine all witnesses; to carry

out every needful perquisition ; to seize and place under seal every object, articles of wearing-apparel, papers, letters, cards, and notes susceptible of throwing light on the affair, and finally to transmit to us directly the official reports drawn up and the objects placed under seal, serving to establish the charge.

Given at Paris, the 27th day of January, 1869.

The clerk handed the warrant of inquiry to Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, who, after reading it carefully, signed it and gave it to me, shaking hands at the same time.

"Good luck, Mr. Commissary ?" he said, at the moment of my taking leave.

I cordially thanked him, adding that I intended to set pluckily to work.

On leaving the Palais de Justice I went straight to the Morgue. The senior attendant was on duty ; I found him engaged in sprucing up the two legs I had caused to be deposited there.

On perceiving me, he said, whilst going on with his work : "Mr. Commissary, I've just bet a quart with my new chum—a bumptious bloke, who wants to teach his grandmother to suck eggs—that those two legs fished up by you out of the water of the well, never carried a woman—I'm rather a judge of women's legs ; they're not a bit like these. I rather fancy that your two district sawbones have fought shy of examining the stuff too near. I don't mind putting my nose to them, and, when I was touching them up, I saw in a jiffy that they were no woman's legs. You'll see if Dr. Tardieu, for he's one of the right sort, doesn't tell you so to-morrow. I've just got the stuff ready for him—the bone found in the drain of the Rue Jacob, as well as the thigh fished out of the river, near the Pont des Saint-Péres. He'll see clear, old Tardieu will, and he'll just tell you what it all is. I suppose you noticed the piece of the breeches which covered one of the legs ? Well, I tell you it formed part of the trousers of a little old man, and you'll see if it isn't so. As for the two legs, though they ain't shaggy, I am cock-sure they never belonged to a woman !"

I put a stop to this fanciful and by far too slangy chatter, by asking when I could affix my seals."

"To-morrow," replied the attendant, "the things will be dry and disinfected.'

On quitting the Morgue, I went at once to the Prefecture of Police. My first visit was to Monsieur Mettetal. In accordance with the Prefect of Police's instructions, the chief of the 1st Division handed to me the papers relating to those persons who had disappeared during the last six months, and whose names commenced with the letter B. There were a hundred and twenty-two of them; thirty-eight men and eighty-four women. In the course of my career, I have remarked that women, being probably a lighter and craftier commodity, disappear much more easily than men. I took my first pick, and forthwith returned a hundred and eight documents, which were relegated to their green cases—the colour of hope, probably because, when once the documents are confided to them, all expectation of being successful in a search is abandoned! I took away with me the papers relating to the remaining fourteen, all of whom were females who had inhabited either the fifth, sixth, or seventh Arrondissements. For each one of these documents I gave a receipt, which was placed in its empty green case.

From the 1st Division I went to call on my former superior, Monsieur Nusse, Chief of the City Police, to ask for the assistance of two detectives, who had become indispensable to me. On being received by Monsieur Nusse, I explained to him the use I intended to put them to.

"Since it is to search for persons who have disappeared," replied my former chief, "I will provide you with officers from one of the inquiry divisions; you are aware that investigations of the kind contemplated always devolve upon them."

"It is because of this," I replied, "that I am anxious to have a couple of detectives in their place. I have no kind of antipathy or personal prejudice against the officers of the inquiry—nay, let me out with it—political inquiry divisions; but these gentry, being only accustomed to find out people's opinions, do not always possess the needful experience

and requisite patience in order to follow up link by link a criminal inquiry, which is often a very long one and rarely lucrative. This political body seems to me to be accustomed to do as little as possible, beyond handing in long accounts of expenses, in order to induce people to think how very busy they have been; besides, they are led to see and study in everything merely the political aspect of the case, even where politics are quite out of place."

"And yet," coldly remarked my former chief, contrary to his usual way with me, "you cannot deny that the members of the inquiry divisions, having already been occupied in making inquiries respecting the persons who have disappeared—the documents concerning whom I see in your hands—are far more qualified than any others to continue the investigations necessary for the discovery of the individuals you are in search of, or whose fate you are anxious to find out. From previous proceedings, they are already acquainted with the families and connections of the persons you want; new faces would only impair the results you seek. Take therefore the two inspectors I offer you, and who will be at your office to-morrow morning at nine o'clock, and then, if you are not satisfied with them, we can make other arrangements."

"We shall only lose time, you will see—"

"Come," added Monsieur Nusse, tapping me in a friendly manner on the shoulder, "I see that, since you have been appointed Commissary of Police, you are prejudiced against my inquiry division. How is that?"

"The fact is that in my official capacity I sometimes see your political agents at work; in a word, sir, they deserve no compliments."

"Well, you shall see them at work again, the two I will send you to-morrow, and I am positive that later on you will come and thank me for their valuable co-operation."

"I wish it with all my heart, though I do not expect it; but you insist, and I must bow to your decision."

I went away greatly disappointed. The coming of these inspectors betokened not aid in my laborious task, but an additional complication that I should have to struggle with. Unfortunately, my forebodings were realised.

CHAPTER V.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THREE PERSONS: A GIRL, A YOUNG MARRIED WOMAN, AND A WIDOW.

ON returning from the Prefecture, I busied myself with various matters connected with the office, and the day passed without my being able to examine the papers which I had obtained from the archives of the 1st Division. I took them home with me, and spent the evening in looking over and studying them. At night, when everything is calm and quiet around, when nothing distracts one from the task on which one is engaged, work becomes easy, and our ideas are clear and more precise.

From an examination of these documents, I gathered that, out of fourteen persons, eleven had left Paris to retire either into the country or abroad. There remained three as to whose traces no kind of discovery could be made: a girl, a young married woman, and a widow, who had inhabited the districts of La Monnaie and the Odéon.

The married woman, whose maiden-name was Badine Colette, and who was the wife of a certain Monsieur Bécroix, and an umbrella-maker by trade, was twenty-four years of age. On the 23rd of December, 1868, she had deserted the domestic hearth to follow her lover, who was her husband's friend and tailor, a man of the name of Mayeux, whose last known address was in the Rue Princesse. The husband, Bécroix, was a huckster, living in the Rue Guisarde; his speciality was cheese, which he would pile up artistically on a small hand-barrow. The variety and excellent quality of his wares had gained for him the nick-name of "walking cheese." He was well known in the vicinity of the Marché Saint-Germain, and made no less than ten francs a day

His application to the Prefect of Police with respect to his wife was rather eccentric. In a fantastical style, he merely asked for the return of the faithless one to the

conjugal roof, and formally promised that he would no longer have his clothes of his former friend Mayeux. The orthography of his letter was on a par with its style. In spite of Bécroix's pressing solicitations and promises, his spouse had hitherto remained unfound.

One of the other two persons that had disappeared was a widow Bernier, whose maiden-name was Courant Balbine, she was twenty-seven years of age, a sempstress by trade, and had occupied, for a period of five years, a tidily-furnished room in the Rue Saint-Sulpice. On the morning of the 20th of December, which was a Sunday, she had gone out elaborately dressed, and, when leaving her key with the doorkeeper, had said: "I am going away for a couple of days, don't forget to give my little canary Fifi its water." No one had seen her since, and Fifi had died of thirst.

Several days after her departure, her relations, having been informed of it by the doorkeeper, had set inquiries on foot; but every attempt made to find her had remained futile—(administrative style). It was strange. A few days previous to the 20th of December she had received from Maître Poulain, a notary at Reuilly-le-Réal, a sum of ten thousand francs, inherited from an aged aunt. She had been awaiting this sum to make her cousin her second husband. She was childless. Her disappearance had greatly puzzled her relatives and neighbours, in fact all those who were acquainted with her mode of life and her regular habits.

The girl who had disappeared, and who likewise remained untraceable, was called Agnes Bévue. She was a native of Nanterre, was seventeen years of age, and employed in the capacity of an apprentice at a celebrated milliner's in the Rue du Bac, who had adhered to certain traditions of the past, notably the use of the "trotter."

Everybody knows the "trotter," not perhaps from having seen him, but at all events from having heard him mentioned. Whilst on her way to deliver goods at the houses of her mistress's customers, Agnes Bévue was always followed by her "trotter," who was wont to assist her in carrying the bandboxes; and the girl had become so used to him, that she could no longer stir out without having him at her heels. And as for him, he could no longer do

without his Agnes. So one day, Agnes Bévue said to herself, in her frolicsome and roguish way, that to be always followed about was becoming monotonous, and she resolved, therefore, to follow in her turn. So one fine morning, it was the 1st of January, the milliner and the "trotter" disappeared.

Agnes's mother, a former dealer in second-hand clothes, who at this time was under the protection of one of the chorus-leaders at the Opera, and dwelt on the Quai des Grands-Augustins, screeched like a frightened guinea-fowl on hearing of her daughter's abduction. All day long she treated her neighbours to her lamentations.

"That scoundrel—that villain Castor (this was the 'trotter's' name)—he has seduced my daughter—an angel of candour and innocence!—But what spell can the fellow have used to inveigle her, with his ugly mug which looks as if it had been carved with a pickaxe? for he hasn't got a human countenance; his snout is a cross between the face of a jockey and the mug of an ape."

Every day, and to everybody the same jeremiads were indulged in. After having gone through all the documents relating to Agnes Bévue, I was almost convinced that Castor Eloi had had no kind of thought of surgical experiments when abducting the girl. For conscience's sake it was as well, though, to find out what had become of the loving couple.

On the following morning, at nine o'clock, and in accordance with the instructions of the head of the City Police, I was waited on by two inspectors belonging to one of the special divisions. They were the same who had already been occupied with the cases of the three missing females whom it was desirable to find.

"Since you have had charge of the preliminary inquiries with reference to these three women you must know all the particulars, as well as the individuals who may be advantageously consulted. Call on these people again; do not neglect the most trifling detail, and, above all, steer clear of all information of a political character. Likewise look over these various papers; they refer to the legs found in the well. I would especially urge you to make a mental

memorandum of the details of the wrapper, and of the tailors who would be likely to use such an article. Act for the best, and that as rapidly as possible."

I supplemented this advice by going over everything that had been said, done, and ascertained; then I dismissed them, but not without reminding them that the most important inquiry would be the one concerning Bécroix's wife.

The following morning they handed me a rather lengthy report. It appeared from their inquiries that the widow Bernier had become the mistress of her employer's brother, a man of independent means living at Saint-Cloud, and who had taken her on a trip to Nice. From that place she had written to her cousin—her husband that was to be, and who was a freethinker. After a spell of matrimony, she had gone in for a free union, doubtless with a view of studying and comparing the advantages and inconveniences of each condition.

As for Agnes Bévue, she had returned to her mother. After having spent a fortnight in furnished lodgings at Nanterre, Castor, the "trotter," had disappeared, leaving the young woman in pawn with the landlord for the expenses of board and lodging. Realising her folly, Agnes had given her mother's address. The eating-house-keeper had called on the latter to propose the girl's restoration on payment of a sum of a hundred and eighty-two francs. At first the good lady had, according to her usual habit, raised quite an outcry, and then had fainted at the conclusion of a nervous attack. But as the man threatened to have the girl arrested for swindling, she resigned herself to paying, not, however, without many recriminations; and set out with the eating-housekeeper to bring her offspring home.

"But supposing," said she to the man, "my daughter has escaped during your absence?"

"No fear of that. As your little dove was my only guarantee, I locked her in the cellar, and here is the key, Don't be alarmed, the door is strong, and so are the walls. This is probably the first time your daughter has been in perfect safety."

"What a dreadful thing for me, sir!" once more groaned the former dealer in second-hand clothes. "My daughter,

and such an angel!—she was born at Nanterre, too, the abode of virtue."

"It's certain she's no longer the chance of becoming a Rosière."*

Mother Bévue recovered possession of her angel, and promised herself that she would never again place her in a house of business where there were "trotters."

I was now acquainted with everything concerning the widow Bernier and Agnes Bévue; but it had been impossible to obtain any particulars respecting the cheesemonger's wife. The man persisted in affirming that the two legs deposited at the Morgue belonged to his wife. On hearing that I had set inquiries on foot, he called on me, and I had to submit to the story of his conjugal troubles.

"That wretch, Mayeux," he added, "used to live in the Rue Princesse, close to the house with the well, which he knew thoroughly, and it was in *his* wrapper, that he secreted my Colette's legs. Oh, the horrible wretch! I only wish I had him in a corner!"

"But come, what reason could he have had to cut up your wife?"

"Why, to get another one. He is an ogre, and Colette is not the first woman he has lured from the path of duty. Several have disappeared from his place. His room is like that of Bluebeard."

"Knowing him to be such a terrible man, why did you admit him into your home?"

"Well, you know, he used to tell me such funny tales—I like funny tales, they make me laugh."

"You seem fond of laughing at the expense of others; now people are laughing at you."

"True enough; but still I should like to see those legs. I am positive I should recognise them as my wife's; if anyone knows them, it is I and Mayeux. But Mayeux won't speak."

"It will not be an interesting or pleasant sight for you. Besides, you must think well beforehand, lest you make a mistake. The doctors have not been able to come to a positive conclusion as to the person's sex; if some false

* The ancient custom of publicly crowning some poor and virtuous girl with a garland of roses still exists at Nanterre.

identification were made, it would give rise to useless proceedings and would turn the inquiry out of its direct course. Had your wife's stockings any special marking?"

"Yes, the letter B."

"Was it placed in this way—

+ B +

—between two crosses?"

"No, there was only a B, with a dot of red cotton."

"Did your wife sometimes wear socks?"

"Men's socks? You too want to laugh at my expense."

"Such is not my custom."

"Show me the legs, and I assure you that I shall recognise them."

"Very well! then you had better be at the Morgue to-morrow (Friday), at one o'clock; we shall find Doctor Tardieu there, and he will put us right on the point of those two legs."

"Go to the Morgue on a Friday? Oh! never, sir! it would bring bad luck. Colette was as superstitious as an old gambler, and I, for my part, am so dreadfully superstitious that I never lay in stock on a Friday; it is because of that that my cheeses are the best in Paris, the most famed, and——"

"Enough! Saturday will be too late. It is impossible for me to alter the date fixed by the authorities, just for the sake of pleasing you; besides, the longer the visit is put off, the more unrecognisable the legs will become through their decomposition, which is already in an advanced state. Therefore, you had better make up your mind."

In order to induce the cheesemonger to quit my office, I rose and went to open the door, saying to him, with a significant gesture:

"That's settled, then: to-morrow, Friday, at one o'clock, at the Morgue."

"Very well, sir! I will be there," answered Bécroix, moving in the direction of the door. "As the matter concerns Colette, I must neglect nothing; so much the worse if my luck turns!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE MORGUE.—DOCTOR TARDIEU.

THE Morgue always awakens recollections of misfortune. It still inspires those unpleasant feelings from which successive changes and improvements have not entirely freed it. Its former gloomy and noisome character has disappeared, and we have now a municipal establishment with an official purpose. Here a public inquiry, as it were, takes place in the light of day; yet the chill of the tomb still seems to hang over it. In actual life, the unforeseen plays an important part, and it is given to no man to say that to-morrow he may not be lying on one of the marble slabs of the Morgue.

The unknown victims of our civil conflicts of 1830, 1848, 1851, and 1871 were deposited on its old slabs, and, by some unaccountable impropriety, after the battle of Buzenval, the corpses of the citizen-soldiers fallen on the field of honour in defence of their native country were moved there. In the midst of those obscure martyrs I identified the young and already celebrated Henri Regnault. On the 5th of September, 1881, after the terrible railway accident at Charenton, amongst the travellers who had been killed and taken to the Morgue, there were several who had never been inside Paris.

What a number of celebrated persons of every kind and description who, suddenly struck down in the public thoroughfares, have been removed to this abode! Many others, unacquainted even with this mortuary building, have been exposed there to the eager or callous stare of the crowd? Much has been written about the Morgue. Combining historical facts with fanciful conceptions, many a romance-writer has woven respecting it stories as imaginary as they were fantastical. Hard and dry facts, however, would more than suffice for its history. It has its register of entries—a

living tomb in the midst of all these corpses. The statistics of the place sum up its work, and, by bringing together the past and present, constitute a glowing tale of mysterious deaths, mostly the result of weariness of life, whose lugubrious endings, sometimes silent, at other times appalling, are full of the surprises and dramas of existence.

As had been agreed upon the day before with the cheesemonger Bécrois, I went to the Morgue on Friday, at one o'clock in the afternoon. Here five dead bodies, which had been in the water for a lengthened period and had consequently become past recognition, had been just carried. What had been the nature of the ends that had befallen these victims?—was it accident, suicide, or crime? The mystery was an impenetrable one!

I asked the registrar whether the old attendant, whom I had met a few days previously, was on duty. I was anxious to have his assistance, for, judging by the picturesque discourse he had favoured me with on the occasion of our first interview, he possessed, in my opinion, the requisite qualifications for the functions he performed.

"Come this way," said the registrar, "and we shall find him in the midst of his usual avocations."

On entering the receiving-room, I beheld him carefully examining an unknown woman who had been found that very morning in the Canal de l'Ourcq. He had just undressed the corpse, whose limbs dropped off at the least touch, so far was the body decomposed. On seeing us enter, he observed to me, without leaving his work:

"You may affix your seals, Mr. Commissary; the wraps of the legs are dry and clean. I must tell you that one of the 'pins,' the right-one, has the mark of a biggish scar; that'll be something for you to go by."

Whilst having his say, he turned the body over and over with a view of discovering a contusion or wound, which might help to determine the manner of death; and it must be said, in his praise, that he conscientiously acquitted himself of his distasteful task.

"I can't discover any trace of violence or tattooing on this woman's body," he observed to the registrar. "She is three teeth short in her lower jaw. Her underclothing is

not marked; only, I have found in the lining of her white petticoat, a receipt in the name of a certain widow C——, signed by a grocer at Aubervilliers. Here's the paper, it may be of use to prove the identity."

"That fellow you see there," the registrar whispered to me, "is a regular godsend to the medical men charged with making the *post-mortem* examinations. To say nothing of the thousand little services he renders them in getting the corpses ready for examination, he can tell, according to the time of year, and that without ever making a mistake, how long a body has been under water and, by inspecting the fingers, hands, feet, or knees, he can often say what occupation the dead person followed. Nothing pleases him more than to establish the identity of some unknown individual. Then he is happy, triumphant. He would certainly make a splendid detective. I have more than once proposed him for the work; but my superiors have always answered:

"Can you replace him?"

"No."

"Then you had better keep him, since he is so useful to you."

"Perhaps they look upon you as chief of the detective force of the dead?" I remarked to the registrar.

The latter smiled and went on: "His probity is on a par with his intelligence. A short time ago a German, whom no one could identify, blew his brains out in the Tuileries garden. This fellow found banknotes to the value of ten thousand francs in the man's boots. He might easily have appropriated the money, without anyone being the wiser; but he honestly handed it over to me. Here we are only answerable for the articles and valuables mentioned in the sheet attached to the body; now, in this case, the Commissary of Police had not discovered the money. Besides, the police authorities are not always in a position to have a corpse minutely searched; so that we often receive bodies here that have got documents, jewels and valuables secreted about their persons, and the existence of which is known to no one; but, thanks to the honesty of the attendants, everything is recovered and restored to their families, supposing we can find them out.

"Two years ago, a singular incident occurred. A murdered man was brought in here, still in possession of his gold watch. A few days afterwards it disappeared from my office. For a moment everyone connected with the Morgue was suspected; but a careful and minute inquiry, instituted by the authorities, satisfactorily proved that our assistants had had nothing to do with the theft. Later on, this very watch brought about the arrest of the murderer. Under pretext of making a declaration, the latter entered the office, secured the article, which had been temporarily laid on a shelf; then he went and sold it to a second-hand dealer."

As the registrar finished speaking, the door opened and Doctor Tardieu entered. After the usual introductions, the legal doctor examined the two legs which had been fished out of the well, and came to the conclusion that they must have belonged to an old man, and that they formed a part of the same body as the thigh which had been found near the Pont des Saints-Pères and the femoral bone picked up in the drain of the Rue Jacob.

"Without any kind of doubt, we are in presence of fragments of the body of an elderly man," observed the doctor.

"Is it possible to tell, from an examination of these remains, the nature of the man's profession?" I inquired. "A tailor, for instance, is always seated cross-legged; and, in the long run, there must occur certain depressions in the form of the limbs, and corns even in some places."

"The outer edges of the feet show nothing abnormal, and there is no kind of callosity on the fifth toe."

I communicated to Monsieur Tardieu the wish which the cheesemonger had given utterance to on the previous evening. I had just been told of his arrival at the Morgue. The doctor replied that there could be no objection to showing him the legs. Bécroix was thereupon introduced into the post-mortem-room.

This apartment, a square and paved one, is lighted up by windows shaded with blinds. The floor is provided with a kind of wooden grating, laid over the flagstones, in order to prevent the pieces of flesh, which might drop from the examination table, being trodden on, and also to prevent the blood and water flowing from the corpse coming into con-

tact with the boots and shoes of the assistants. In the middle of the room, there stands a long, narrow, and slightly-concave table, supported on a single leg. This table is easily turned round on its leg, thus affording an opportunity of exposing to the bright light those portions of the body which have to be examined with the most minute care. It is at this table that the murderer is frequently brought face to face with his victim. It is there that the examining magistrate, with his eyes riveted on those of the culprit, tells the latter to look on the wounds and bruises he has produced. And, should the examining magistrate fail to obtain the truth from the mouth of the living culprit, the doctor, a moment or two afterwards, endeavours to arrive at it by making the dead body speak, so to say.

A marble basin, shaped like a large shell, and capable of holding about a hundred quarts of water, serves for washing the pieces of flesh subjected to a special examination. In this basin may often be seen a hand, a foot, an arm, a leg, a head, floating higgledy-piggledy. Whether the fountain is being emptied or filled, these separate portions of one, or even of several bodies, keep turning around each other, bobbing about in their fantastic jolts, which resemble the steps of the dance of Death.

Doctor Tardieu had the thigh that had been found on the seventeenth of December near the Pont des Saints-Pères, the femoral bone found in the drain of the Rue Jacob, and the two legs that had been fished out of the well of the Rue Princesse placed on the anatomical table. Bécroix carefully examined these mortal remains; then he formally declared that the two legs were those of his wife, but he was not so positive about the thigh. As for the femoral bone, he could not recognise it at all."

"You very much desire to be a widower then?" observed the doctor.

"Why so?"

"Because those limbs belong to an individual of the male sex!"

"I don't know about that. One thing is certain, that I recognise my wife's legs; why, hang it all, I have seen them often enough!"

"How old was your wife?"

"Twenty-four."

"Her height?"

"Tall."

"Her feet?"

"Quite tiny ones, the size of my hand."

"Had she a wound, a scar, caused by a scrofulous abscess, on one of her legs?"

"No, nothing of the kind."

"Used she to keep her feet clean? This is so rare in the case of bodies brought to the Morgue, that it is necessary to ask the question."

"She did not, but for all that my Colette was a fine woman."

"And those socks, to the extremities of which the upper-ends of a woman's stockings have been added—and this piece of a pair of cloth trousers—do they also belong to your wife?"

"No; but they do to Mayeux."

"Who is Mayeux?"

"Why, he is her lover."

"Believe me when I tell you that these human remains never belonged to Madame Bécroix. Your wife is tall, the person who has been cut up was short; your wife had small feet, these are fairly big ones; and, to conclude, you see on this leg a very distinct scar, whereas you tell me your wife had none."

"That is all perfectly true," replied the cheesemonger, on taking his leave; "but I am none the more convinced, for those are positively my wife's legs. After all, so much the worse for her! she oughtn't to have gone off with that scoundrel, Mayeux."

"Those legs," Monsieur Tardieu informed me as soon as Bécroix had left, "have been severed with considerable skill by a trained hand. It is not the work of a surgeon or medical man, but it may be that of a butcher or sausage-maker. The instrument used for dividing them seems to me to have been a chopper. The cuts are clean ones, they must have been made immediately after death. There has been an effusion of blood. But that does not help us much; and, unless the head is found, it will be difficult to establish the victim's identity. This master-carver took his precautions uncommonly well."

I drew the doctor's attention to the fact that, owing to the two medical men, who had been summoned to examine the legs on their removal from the well, having recognised them as being female limbs, I had directed my first inquiries in accordance with that basis, and I expressed my regret at the time that had been wasted in fruitless proceedings.

"Yes," he replied, "it frequently happens that our colleagues in the neighbourhood, who may be called upon to make preliminary investigations, are not always of our way of thinking in many a criminal inquiry. That is caused, I fancy, from a somewhat superficial examination on their part. It is true that in cases of this description they have not the same responsibility as we legal doctors have. Our opinions may have terrible consequences from the judicial or public points of view. The representatives of justice cannot have too many safeguards; they are bound to select the most highly-trained and most experienced men, and those whose testimony is incontrovertible, for the responsibility attaching to legal doctors is a terrible one. It is the same with mad-doctors. A word of theirs settles a sentence. A statement implying irresponsibility, frequently clears a culprit, whereas the contrary will often bring about his death."

"I fully appreciate, doctor, the gravity of your position, for a word of yours might cause a head to fall."

"Good-day, Mr. Commissary," said Monsieur Tardieu, on withdrawing; "should you stand in need of me, you will find me to-morrow, about five o'clock, in the examining magistrate's office."

The doctor having gone, I placed under seal the material in which the two legs had been wrapped up, and I affixed to the bundle, by means of some red sealing-wax, a label, worded as follows:—

POLICE STATION
OF THE
ODEON DISTRICT.

Official Report of January 26th, 1869

CASE . . . . UNKNOWN

PRESUMPTION OF CRIME.

SINGLE SEAL.

Five pieces of black glazed calico, one of which measures a square yard. Two pieces of iron-grey corded cloth. Two socks, sewed to the uppers of a pair of woman's stockings, and bearing the mark + B +, the whole having enveloped two human legs, drawn up from the well of the house situated in the Rue Princesse.

The Commissary of Police,

G. MACÉ.

The sealing accomplished, I left the parcel at the Morgue and forthwith went in the direction of the Palais de Justice, in order to inform the Public Prosecutor and the examining magistrate of what had just occurred.

"We are," said I to them, in conclusion, "in presence of the limbs of an old man who has been terribly mutilated."

"We must at all costs know," replied the examining magistrate, "who this man is."

"I shall not leave a stone unturned until I have established the old fellow's identity."

CHAPTER VII.

ART IN THE FORCE.—EPISTOLARY INSANITY.—A HEAD WITHOUT A NAME.—MOTHER MICHEL.

In matters appertaining to the police, the whole art of the profession lies in doing as little as possible oneself and in allowing persons interested in a case, either through their inclinations or their passions, to act themselves; whilst, however, watching them very closely. The passions—these are the real and natural instruments of the force. It is the human passions which rule and govern the universe. They provoke smiles and tears, pleasure and pain; they beget heroes as well as great criminals. Crime has always either love or hatred, jealousy, revenge, ambition, pride, or greed, and sometimes—nay, frequently—a combination of all these passions, as incentive. What theses have been upheld and are yet to be upheld, what books have been written and are yet to be written, with reference to these three words: "The Human Passions!"

The magistrate or police-officer charged with discovering a criminal must, above all things, possess a sense of duty—leave nothing to chance, but expect everything from himself and take advantage of everything; he must know how to bow to professional exigencies; he must bring himself to the level of every situation; and he must mingle in every grade of society, without forgetting for a single moment the capacity in which the law has placed him. He must arm himself with patience, never to be rebuffed, and hope even against hope. Legal doctors, like commissaries of police, have frequently repulsive duties to perform. The investigations, whether of a physical or moral character, which they have to make are often sickening ones and require well-tried strength of will, force of character, and temperament. Zealous and fanatical members of the force, have, by way of compensation for their labours, the satisfaction of duties well performed and the emotions of an explorer in the midst of the unknown.

In matters of criminal investigation, no kind of detail must be neglected. Many things must be considered before certain cases are taken in hand, especially those in which the criminal is sole witness. It is necessary to reconstitute the case in all its phases, in order to discover any elements of information which it may furnish and to exclude the possibility of suicide. The most trifling incidents, the smallest details must be noted and brought to light; and in their own good time they may take shape and, as a single spark lights up a great fire, may cause light to flash from darkness. Young commissaries of police cannot be sufficiently alive to the fastidious care which it is imperative to bring to bear on preliminary inquiries, on the scene of a murder or suicide. A small piece of paper, a bit of rag, a button, a pin, a match, a partly-burnt candle, any trifle overlooked under such circumstances often nips all future investigations in the bud; whereas, this trifle, if picked up and examined, frequently gives—sometimes at once, sometimes later—the key to a mystery which at first sight appeared impenetrable.

Murderers generally commit themselves by having taken too many or too few precautions. They rarely know how to preserve the exact medium to make things appear natural. Hence the police has only to confine itself to questions of detail which, insignificant at first sight, finish by taking consistency and finally become certain and safe guides on the path of truth. In a world full of falsehood and hypocrisy, to discover the truth is frequently a very difficult thing, and all the more so as those who know it hide it with the utmost care.

The machinery of the law always more or less frightens the majority of the persons with whom it is obliged to come into contact. People have no idea of the effect produced by a domiciliary visit to the lodgers of a house. It is a general scare and disappearance. Each one examines his conscience, people dread having to give their name and surname, frequently to hide a false and delicate position. In a word, light could often be shed on doubtful matters by many persons; but they are afraid to speak out—some through fear of the law, as we have just explained; others through fear of ulterior vengeance; others, again, to avoid loss of time and inconvenience; and some (these belong to

the category of the selfish) because it is something which does not concern them. Loss of time—that is the veritable stumblingblock in the majority of criminal cases. To this must be added the dread which springs up amongst timid persons of the police, the law, the assizes, judges, and the law courts, which, to many, is a maze into which they only penetrate with the greatest hesitation.

Neither must we forget the dread with which the counsel for the prosecution inspires the witnesses for the defence, and the counsel for the defence the witnesses for the prosecution; and this is especially the case with certain barristers more skilled in attacking than in defending, and who, feeling themselves powerless to prove the innocence of their client, do their best to whitewash him by addressing injurious remarks to the witnesses. The questioning of the latter likewise requires qualities which everybody does not possess. It is indispensable to know how to set them at their ease, whilst addressing them calmly and gently, not to hurry them, to give them opportunities of speaking freely, for, in addition to much useless matter, they may say what is of consequence, while they can always be brought back to the main question, should they happen to lose sight of it.

The examining magistrate should let them have their say, and while they speak he must slowly gather from the flux of words any that may be of importance.

It is always a dangerous thing, in the matter of criminal investigations, to jump to any hasty conclusion; for at times the most improbable things come to pass. My experience has often proved this to me. I have seen cases come to a head as a result of steps primarily considered useless ones, and which were only taken for conscience's sake and in virtue of the principle: *Neglect nothing.* According to whether he is well or badly supported, the magistrate presiding over an inquiry has more or less chance of success. This is one of those truths which Monsieur de La Palisse would not have disclaimed. Who is there but has known some of those officials? Intelligent men, it must be owned, but yet more pretentious withal than intelligent. Obstinacy, the outcome of false pride, is the attribute of men thus gifted.

Let an idea, however pertinent it may be or is likely to

become, be uttered by anyone else than this pretentious and pigheaded official, and you may be sure that he will not give ear to it! On the contrary, let him form an opinion of his own on a case, and you may be certain that he will hold fast to it. Three times out of four, an inquiry entrusted to the sagacity of such a man is doomed to failure beforehand.

Since the discovery of the first pieces of human flesh in the case we are now concerned with, the publicity given by the press to the various circumstances connected with it had been considerable. This publicity gave rise to the idea that the murdered person had vanished from surroundings in which he was but little known, since it was found impossible to succeed in establishing his identity. The public at large take a far greater interest than would be credited in mysterious legal inquiries. Each time an obscure murder is committed, the law and police-officials are overwhelmed with letters of every kind and description—some, emanating from people who are crazed; others from facetious mystifiers; many from spiteful and jealous persons ever ready to cast a slur on those who give them umbrage; and finally those, and these are in the minority, from respectable citizens who, from integrity of character and hatred of what is bad, hold it to be a duty to enlighten the authorities in the searching inquiry which it is their office to institute.

These letters are nearly always anonymous ones, or else signed by fictitious names. Only persons who are more or less demented, dare give a name and address. Such people dread nothing; they fear neither God nor devil, and are ready to be burnt alive rather than flinch from their opinions. Letters, therefore, reached me in shoals, and most of them without being prepaid. To detail every piece of advice I received would be too tedious. I will, therefore, confine myself to quoting a few extracts from this extravagant correspondence.

"I am a disciple of Allan-Kardec," a medium wrote to me. "I require to come into contact with an article that has touched a part of the corpse—one of the socks. When in possession of it, I undertake to obtain from one of the spirits of the invisible world with whom I am in direct communication, the whole truth concerning the mystery of the *two legs*. Slowly but surely the spotless spirit which

overwhelms one with its favours will ascend the mysterious ladder, and reach the spot where the criminal deed which gives you such anxiety was committed. Believe in me.

"X. Z., Professor of Psychological Studies,

"Rue Saint M."

The disciple of Allan-Kardec had signed his name in full, giving at the same time his address.

"Boulogne-sur-Mer, Jan. 29th, 1869.

"I am the assassin of the woman whose legs are in your possession. In spite of all the efforts of the police and your own personal researches, you won't catch me. When this letter reaches you, I shall be on the high-seas.

"*I loved that woman; she resisted me—I therefore cut her into pieces.*—ANTONY.

"Not only will you not catch me; but, what is more, you'll have to pay fourpence on my account, since you have no postal-frank privilege."

This parodist of the celebrated line on which the curtain drops in Alexandre Dumas' "Antony" was quite right: his prose cost me fourpence. Postal franks, in the case of commissaries of police of the Department of the Seine, exist between colleagues only and for the strict needs of the service.

"Just have a good look whether the string which tied up the two legs is of the same thickness as that used by sugar-loaf packers. Those men are capable of anything.—A GROCER'S ASSISTANT."

"In spite of all your investigations, you have as yet made no kind of discovery in connection with the murdered woman. In my capacity of an *extra-lucid* somnambulist, I am at your disposal. Do you wish to consult me? If so, bring with you one of the pieces of stuff which were wrapped round the legs. When I have that in my possession success will be certain. The victim and the murderer will then be ours, as I am yours.—WIDOW C——, Rue ——."

The somnambulistic widow had signed her name and address in full.

"Cusset (Allier), Jan. 30th, 1869.

"I see in my newspaper that you have set inquiries on foot among prostitutes, respecting the woman who has been cut up in pieces. How wrong both you and your investi

gating magistrate are! I am a religious and an honest man. Here is a case, and at the same time my opinions on the subject:—A month ago, a nun disappeared from a convent at Moulins, carried off by a young stranger of martial bearing. After having ravished her, he doubtless made away with the girl by cutting her into pieces. If it is not her, which I sincerely trust is the case, then look out for another sister of charity who has been debauched by an unfrocked-priest, and afterwards murdered by him. The wearers of cassocks have some fair notions of anatomy, which will account for the carefully-performed operation. Only, in order to find him and to hold your own against him and his supporters, take good care you employ police-agents who are not Jesuits. Be prudent. Later on, you shall have my name and address. Never give any money to people anxious to dispose of information; they are rogues."

"I have written five letters to you, to inform you that there has disappeared from the house of the distiller in the Rue du Four, the servant of an old rogue named Clément, who is capable of every kind of infamy to satisfy his passions. You have not as yet paid a visit at the wretch's house, who nevertheless is a great criminal.—Widow C.'

"You do not seem to succeed in solving the problem of the woman cut into pieces. Although I have only *condescended* to devote a couple of hours to it, I have gathered as much as this:—The corpse comes from the operating-theatre connected with the clinical ward of the Ecole de Médecine. A couple of students said to one another, 'Let's have a lark,' whereupon they forthwith removed, piece by piece, portions of a corpse that had been subjected to a post-mortem examination. You think, perhaps, that every dead body in a hospital is numbered, and that it is regularly accounted for. This is a mistake. You will soon be convinced of it on receiving at your private residence, prepaid, the head you are in search of. All you have to find out are these two sweeps of students; with a good plan, and two skilful detectives, you will discover nothing at all.—Cara Binette."

Cara Binette kept faith with me by forwarding the head to my private residence, as will be seen later on.

"I take the liberty of mixing myself up in a matter which does not concern me; but, as it is a question of a woman who has been murdered, I also have a right to speak, and I make use of it. I notice, in the papers, that there are three principal points in this case:—1st, The victim has been cut up by a hand used to cutting up meat; 2nd, The murderer must have stanched the blood by means of sawdust; 3rd, The tied legs prove that the murderer was used to making bindings like those used with trussed fowls or stuffed shoulders of mutton. These three facts, taken together, prove that this horrible crime must have been committed by a dealer in horseflesh. Those men are cruel knackers and slaughtermen; they pretend to carry on the same trade as yours obediently,—MOUTON, Butcher."

"You evidently think the French people very silly to attach faith to all the falsehoods published by the press in connection with the cut-off legs? The legs you took out of the well were put there by the police; they come from a hospital. It was a Badinguet who got up that move, in order to squeeze in another tax. The whole thing is as imaginary as the case of Troppman.—A FREETHINKER, a lover of truth, who fears no one, and sorry he cannot sign his name for the sake of annoying Badinguet."

"If you will induce the *Figaro* to supply me with an exact plan of the Place Saint-André-des-Arts, as well as with the names of the householders and tradespeople of that locality, I will undertake to provide you with details which shall lead to a discovery of the identity of the victim of the well in the Rue Princesse, and also the name of the murderer. A photographic view would suit me best. Carry out my request and you shall know all—this I swear.—D. K. U., Poste Restante at Lyons."

"Muster Masa,—I sen you these fu woords fur to tel you that the hasasin of the wuman leves in the ru de Canat 15. Is name is Anicé Bo-mi-né.—MA TURINE."

"Mr. Commissary,—I beg to draw your attention to an individual who, every night for the last six weeks or two months, between eight and nine o'clock, comes and throws small parcels, about the size of one's hand, in the opening of the drain in the Rue Jacob, facing the Rue Saint-Benoît.—SERIOUS ADVICE."

Of all this epistolary insanity, the two last letters only. deserved consideration.

An inquiry bearing on the document signed "Ma Turine" brought to light that, for a long time past, there had lived, in a garret under the rafters at 15, Rue des Canettes, a worthy old man of the name of Bominé. Being privileged, in consequence of his infirmities, to beg at one of the entrance-gates of the church of Saint-Sulpice, he had brought down on himself the hatred and jealousy of another beggar, a female, of the name of Mathurine, who had thought it a charitable thing to accuse him of an act he knew nothing whatever about, considering that the man was totally deaf and could not hold conversation with anyone.

The statement bearing on the small parcels thrown into the drain of the Rue Jacob, was a true one. A watch was undertaken by constables Ringué and Champy, and towards nine o'clock at night it revealed to them the author of these mysterious doings. He was a man of about fifty, grave and respectable in his bearing. The inquiry showed that he was of independent means and a bachelor, somewhat eccentric, and a member of the Society for the Protection of Animals. Passing one evening close to the opening of the sewer in question he had heard mewings, and since that time he had brought a little meat every night at the same hour to feed the cats which he could hear in the drain.

A final and more lugubrious mystification occurred under the following circumstances. On Monday, the 1st February, I was on duty in the Odéon Theatre. The performance consisted of a three-act comedy by Monsieur Laluyé, "The Rights of the Heart," of Monsieur Coppé's "Passer-by," and of a piece of Molière's "Monsieur de Pourceaugnac."

I was informed, in the course of the evening, that two young fellows and their mistresses, slightly the worse for drink, were in the Ministerial stage-box on the first tier, on the prompt side, whence they were interrupting the actors, by laughing and talking very loud, to such an extent that the occupants of the stalls were beginning to get angry. At the next interval, I sent the box-keeper to inform these persons, who were occupying an official and free place, to behave themselves in a more seemly manner. Their reply

to the box-keeper, expressed in not very parliamentary terms, was: "The box is our own, we have paid for it, and we don't care a hang for the Minister. You may tell the Commissary to come himself. We'll receive him as he deserves." Thereupon they roughly closed the box door in the woman's face.

At this, I intervened, and, after having summoned them to open the door, I had the two disturbers arrested, and taken to the police-office attached to the theatre. On being asked to give their names, they energetically refused to do so, whereupon I had them searched, and their visiting-cards were found upon them. They were the sons of two foreigners of distinction. I made them understand the delicate position in which they had placed themselves of their own free will, whereupon they explained to me that, after having dined somewhat freely in company with their mistresses at the restaurant Leserteur, the two women had expressed their desire to hear Sarah Bernhardt and Agar in their respective characters of Zanetto and Sylvia in the "Passer-by,"

As they were nearing the entrance to the theatre, they were accosted by an individual, who appeared to be a servant, and who offered them a ticket for the Ministerial box, in exchange for twenty francs. After finding out at the box-office that the ticket was a genuine one, they concluded the bargain, and entered without difficulty. Finally the young men ended their statement by making their apologies in suitable words, and I permitted them to return to their seats, fully convinced that they would keep quiet.

I went to the manager to inform him of the incident.

"That does not surprise me in the least," replied Monsieur Duquesnel, with a knowing smile. "Half the time the official seats are either sold, or occupied by servants, messengers, or the unpaid tradespeople of various functionaries. Besides, you cannot be unaware of the trade which is carried on with the seats which the theatrical managers place at the disposal of the authorities."

"That is true. I remember how, on the occasion of a first performance, I was compelled to turn out of a stall set aside for the public service, a charcoal-dealer, who only wanted his sack on his back to be fully equipped. It took

me no end of trouble to make the honest fellow understand that the least he could do would be to go and wash himself. You gentlemen of the stage are not the only persons imposed upon in this way. The railway companies often refuse a pass to one of their unassuming employés for some unavoidable journey, and yet there are a number of tradesmen and fast women who never pay for their tickets at all. These are the people who benefit by the permanent passes placed at the disposal of the chief Government offices."

Someone tapped discreetly at the manager's door.

"Come in," said Monsieur Duquesnel.

The footman appeared, and informed me that a police-officer wished to speak to me on important business. It was Champy, who brought me a letter which Doctor Tardieu had sent to my office. The envelope had a broad black edge and bore a black seal representing a human skeleton.

"Another joker amusing himself at my expense," I remarked to Monsieur Duquesnel, as I tore it open, and I read as follows :—

"Here at last is the promised head! Now you will be able to discover the identity of the woman whose legs were cut off. I have read somewhere—and it must be as reliable as the price of music—that a celebrated American doctor hit upon the ingenious idea of examining the eyes of a woman who had just been murdered. He discovered therein not only the portrait of the murderer, which had become reflected and fixed by the terror produced in her eyes at the very moment of the crime, but, likewise, the place where the deed was committed, and every object that was facing the victim.

"The head I forward you, in a box, has wide-open and brilliant eyes. The eyes in nowise express terror—on the contrary, they reflect a final glimmer of happiness. The portrait of her lover, who is at the same time the murderer, should be found reproduced in the left eye, on the side nearest the heart. By setting promptly to work with a magnifying photographic camera, you will obtain the murderer's true likeness.—Wholly yours, CARA BINETTE."

"It is written in a man's style," I observed, "but the small neat writing reveals a woman's hand."

"Happy youth, amused at everything!" said Monsieur

Duquesnel. "But, talking about obtaining photographs from the eyes, I fancy I have read something bearing on some such phenomenon."

"You are quite right: a certain American doctor has maintained that every object facing a person who is being murdered becomes photographed on the eye, and that in this way one could not only obtain the murderer's portrait, but also the condition of the surroundings where the crime was committed."

"The whole scenery of a play in miniature."

"The Medico-Legal Society long since refuted this absurd assumption, which was no more than an advertisement. America, you know, is the home of every kind of eccentricity and every kind of impudence, and Cara Binette has probably heard speak of this matter. So good-day, my dear sir. I am just going to have a look at this female's head, which can be of no use to me. The man or woman who sends it me has no idea of the brain-toil I am going through to discover a trace of the owner of the two legs of the Rue Princesse."

I found a small square box at my office. It had been brought by a stranger, at the same time as the letter. Inside it I found, in the midst of a quantity of bran and wrapped up in a piece of a white petticoat, a head, or rather the skull of a human head, the various parts of which were joined together by means of brass wire. The upper portion was covered with woman's hair, which was long and powdered, and fastened on by glue. Eyelashes and eyebrows were indicated by black paint above and below two big blue enamel eyes which were inserted in the room of the natural ones. A mask studded with gold and silver spangles, with a phenomenal nose and a long, turned-up chin, gave a grotesque appearance to these human remains. Thirty-two genuine small and equally-placed teeth, regular symmetrically encased pearls, formed a striking contrast with the tinsel stuff which decked the head. As I had foreseen, it was a lugubrious joke on the part of some medical student.

"To whom could this head have belonged?" This was the question I asked myself, as I examined it.

Was it the head of a young woman who had died of con-

sumption in some hospital-ward? Through the indiscretion of a facetious student, it had served during carniyal-time as a plaything to some hussy, surrounded by her lovers of an hour. I had the box closed up again, and forwarded it to Doctor Tardieu, with an explanatory note.

The following evening, having nothing special on hand—a rare occurrence at that epoch, when public meetings used to keep us commissaries ever on the move—I proceeded to my private room, and, having closed the shutters and doors, I racked my brains about the mystery which still clung to the story of the two amputated legs. I examined, one by one, every possible hypothesis. They were all admissible, but not a single one seemed more likely than another,

"Which of all the passions that shake the universe can have armed the murderer's hand—love, jealousy, hatred, revenge, or greed?"

As many mysteries as words; as many notes of interrogation, to which I could find no kind of reply.

"If only the victim's identity could be established, I should then have something to go upon. I would be in a position to study the surroundings in which she lived, know her friends, haunts, likes, and shortcomings—the likeliest shortcomings of all connected with her—of the people she saw and associated with, for the murderer can only have been one of her acquaintances. A criminal who murders a person to whom he is unknown, does not take the trouble to cut the body up, and to scatter the limbs in various places. Yet the legs were fished up out of the well; they should therefore lead me on the road to discovery."

I had got thus far with my reflections, when I heard someone knock timidly at my study-door.

"Who can that be calling here on me to-night?" I asked myself, as I went to let the person in. It was police-constable Champy.

"Excuse my coming and disturbing you, sir," said he, entering, "but I have been to your house, and, as you were not at home, I thought I might find you here."

"You knew, however, that I was not on duty to-night."

"That was precisely why I said to myself, on finding you away from home, 'The chief must be busy now trying to unravel our matter!' And so I came on here."

"Well, have you anything fresh to tell me?"

"If you please—that's the very reason why I've come."

"Well and good! Sit down, and let us have a talk."

Champy raised some difficulties; but, as I insisted, he made pretence to sit on the edge of a chair, and, turning his hat round and round in his hands, he awaited my questions.

"Now then," I said to him, "what interesting news have you to communicate to me?"

"Oh, nothing much—only I thought that it might be useful for you to know it."

"Speak up then."

"You know that the doorkeeper of the house with the well is a countrywoman of mine?"

"I know that, and I also remember that you were to go and see her."

"I have done so more than once. At first, we couldn't get on together at all, she would talk of nothing but her animals, and, when I asked her a few questions, she kept on saying: 'Whitey-whitey—all black——'"

"That is the cat she has lost."

"At last, however. I got her to jabber a bit, and, though she is very mistrustful, I finally succeeded in gaining her confidence. She comes from Châteauvillain, close to Chaumont, where she has got a couple of nieces who know my people. This morning she let me stand her some lunch at her place; and I noticed that when she is at table she becomes more communicative."

"Did you talk to her about the matter?"

"We talked of nothing else except her cat Whitey-whitey, which she recovered this morning."

"Does she seem to know anything of consequence?"

"Nothing as regards the well; but she keeps on spinning all kinds of yarns, and tells them in such a strange way that perhaps you would do well to pay her a visit."

"Such was my intention, and I was waiting for a favourable moment."

"I think this is one; she is rather jolly this evening."

"It is only just eight, so I will go and call upon her."

"Whatever you do, sir, give her plenty of rope, and let her talk in her own way, and, moreover, flatter her a bit and stroke her pets, otherwise—"

"Be easy, Champy, I will follow your advice."

"A quarter of an hour later, I entered Mademoiselle Xoru's room. She was alone and on the point of sitting down to supper. I arrived, therefore, at the right moment. A magnificent white cat was stretching itself on a chair, and on the tiled floor a little short-haired grey-coloured dog was frisking about at the sight of the preparations for the meal. I mentioned my name.

"I thought you would pay me a visit," remarked Mademoiselle Xoru, handing me a worn-out cane-chair. "Your man Champy, who is a decent kind of lad, said to me, this morning, 'you don't walk as well as you used to; but the governor is young, he'll come himself.'"

"I know you are often not so well as you might be; so, to save you from tiring yourself, I put off the chat we must have together."

As I said this, I passed my hand along the back of the cat, which thanked me by a very flattering purr. Wishing to have his share of the caresses, the dog began to jump between my legs, and, as I held out my arm towards him, he licked my hand. I had at once become the friend of the family. On seeing me on such excellent terms with her pets, the door-keeper favoured me with her most graceful smile and began her repast.

"You are known in the neighbourhood by the name of Mother Michel?"

"Speak a little louder; I am rather hard of hearing, especially at meal times."

I raised my voice on repeating my question.

"Yes, that's what I'm called because of my animals."

"How many have you got?"

"Two cats, a dog, and my chaffinch: just look at that little galley-slave in his cage there, on the chest of drawers. The son of a former lodger used to treat the poor bird very badly. He is chained up."

"The child is?"

"No, the bird. When he wants to drink he is obliged to pull up that small pail of water with his beak and claw; and when he wants to eat he draws along that little card-board-truck. But you should see how clever he is. To

make him sing the better, do you know what that monster of a child did to him?"

"What did he do to him?"

"It's horrible!—he burned his eyes out with a red-hot iron. I have had the finch now close upon two years—he is merry! He sings—he keeps on chirping like the sparrows. He knows me when I speak, but he cannot see me, poor dear!"

"You are very fond of animals, are you not?"

"Yes, as fond of them as the Almighty."

"Your fellow-countryman, Champy, tells me that you have found the cat which had disappeared."

"Quite true—that's Whitey-whitey, the one that has just been purring—he's my Benjamin. Just fancy, he found his way to that horrid seed-merchant in the Rue des Ciseaux, who shut him up to catch the mice—but Whitey-whitey won't touch such nasty things—it's not his business either. Consequently, when he saw me enter the man's shop this morning, he commenced to mew terribly. He drinks nothing but milk, and eats nothing but lights."

Whilst telling me about her cat's troubles, Mademoiselle Xoru went on with her supper, munching her words and her stew at the same time, which neither hastened the meal nor the conversation. Before broaching the subject which had brought me thither, I waited for the conclusion of her supper and of the account of Whitey-whitey's adventures. When both had come to an end, I asked her:

"What is your opinion about those two legs fished out of your well?"

"Can't make head or tail of it. It has set the house quite topsyturvy. They'll make me die before my time with that business. The lodgers don't seem to talk of anything else; each one wants to know this and that. How can I tell why the vagabonds threw those legs in my well, rather than in my neighbour's? And such a good well too, such beautiful water—princess's water! Why, I have been drinking of it for the last fifty years, and, if it hadn't been for the bother with that hussy of a lodger, I would be now as well and as strong as the towers of Saint-Sulpice."

"Have you any bad lodgers, then? I am astonished at

that, for the particulars I have received about them all are most favourable."

"Yes, about the present ones; but some time ago I had in one of the small rooms upstairs a regular varmint of a girl. Ah! good heavens! what flighty young people there are about nowadays—they are like so much eider-down. And, talk about impudence—why, they treat you as if they were your equals."

"And what has become of that good-for-nothing girl?"

"Luckily, for the repose of my remaining years, she left the house last quarter-day."

"What is her name?"

"Mathilde."

"Mathilde is her christian-name; but what is her surname?"

"She used to call herself 'Mademoiselle Dard,' but that mayn't have been her real name. I don't think she had any more name than morals."

"What was her occupation?"

"The streets. She was always gadding, eating, or sleeping."

"Had she no other kind of occupation that you know of?"

"I rather think she used to make wedding-waistcoats sometimes for a little tailor."

The word *tailor* made me prick up my ears; Mademoiselle Xoru's long-winded conversation was beginning to interest me.

"Does she not work any more?"

"About four months ago, she said to me: 'Deuce take the wedding-waistcoats!—people don't seem to get married, nowadays—I'm off on the spree!' And she suddenly disappeared for a whole week. I thought her goodness knows where! or perhaps dead, and I was saying to myself: 'It's a good riddance!' when, one fine evening, in she walks, regularly rigged out. Talk about furs!—why she was nothing but furs from top to toe, and with a boa round her neck too. 'That,' says she to me, 'that's skunk; and my muff, isn't it a beauty? Real chinchilla?' Why, it was as big as a soldier's busby!"

"Have you seen anything of her since last quarter-day?"

"No, but I have heard say that she has become a regular doxy."

"Did she leave the house of her own accord?"

"Oh! dear no! why she would have stopped here to the end of her days. Luckily, the manager, Monsieur Lampon, the cookshop-keeper next door, gave her notice. Ah! he's a worthy man, Monsieur Lampon; he is just like Whitey-whitey, he doesn't care for crawling about the top floors. But when the minx went, she did everything she could to annoy me, and called me all sorts of names. And didn't I give it her back! I called her lazybones, caterpillar, pleasure-machine, and a good many other things besides. And, when she heard all that, she wanted to beat me; and I really do think that, if she hadn't been stopped, she would have thrown me down the well. She shoved her fist in my face, saying: 'Will you shut up your old bat's mug? Yes, I've got thirty-six lovers, but you, you're too ugly even to find an old carcass who would help you to open the door—even old Ripaton, your husband that was to be, has jilted you. You know whom I mean, well enough, Ripaton, the cobbler in that shanty in the Rue Guisarde—I am going to make you, as a New Year's gift, a waistcoat for him, embroidered with orange-blossoms, which my great-grandmother wore on her wedding-day, that'll help you to remember your withered youth, you old doorkeeper! She called me an old doorkeeper!—oh, the hussy! when I think of it, it seems to turn me inside out!"

Whilst telling me all this, Mother Michel was quite upset. I thought it best to cut these complaints short by putting some further questions.

"Used your quarrelsome lodger to have many visitors?"

"Rather!—it was quite a procession from morning till night, and from night till morning, especially after one of the Bullier balls. A veritable perpetual motion. People kept on asking: 'Mademoiselle Dard! Mademoiselle Dard! Mademoiselle Dard!' 'The devil take you!' I at last said to all those people. I was going out of my mind, raving mad. I couldn't eat a thing or get a wink of sleep, from perpetually shouting out: 'Fifth floor, at the end of the passage, the name is on the door.'"

"Did not this girl Dard have a special lover—someone she preferred to the others?"

"Why, bless you, they were all of them preferred—a regular puss after the toms. The one that came more often than the others, though, was the little assistant at the chemist's close by. He used to bring her of a morning some bicarbonate, a gargle."

"Did she not leave you her new address, when she went away?"

"I don't think she knew it herself. She sold her furniture—a bedstead, a chest of drawers, and two chairs—to the second-hand dealer in the Rue de l'Echaudé, to whom she said, 'I am off to Persia, to mew, mew, with the Shah.'"

"What day did she leave your house?"

"The 7th of January, early in the morning."

"When the legs were discovered in the well, you told Monsieur Lampon that you suspected her of having drowned your cat. Had you any special reason for crediting her with such a wicked act?"

"Well, I always thought so, because she used to stroke Whitey-whitey, and would never touch Blackey. One day she pulled quite a large tuft of hair out of his tail, pretending that she was going to give it to her little cousin, who was to put it in his pocket when drawing for the conscription, so that he might get a lucky number. It was the fortune-teller who had given her that piece of advice. I threatened her with the police, but she began to laugh, and said: 'Fancy the police troubling about Mother Michel's cat—that's all very well in Punch and Judy shows.' She christened my cat 'Good Hope,' and threatened that if her cousin, whom she was to marry, drew an unlucky number, she'd walk Whitey-whitey off and sell him to an eatinghouse-keeper of the Barrière d'Enfer."

"The girl strikes me as being more larkish than vicious. She certainly ought to have been more civil to you, and not to have worried your pets; but still you had no reason to believe that she had drowned it."

"Stop a bit, I haven't told you all yet. Three months ago, she tried to set everybody against me, so that I might get turned out of the place, all on account of a fellow who used to visit her in the evenings and who wrote a letter about

me to the chief of the police, saying that, what with my pets and me, the house had become a regular pigsty, that I was poisoning everybody. That scoundrel of a man hated me because I had found fault with him for spilling water on my stairs."

"Was he a water-carrier then?"

"Not he—he was a tailor who used to bring her work, and she would get him to carry up her drinking-water. Oh! he used to leave puddles on every landing."

"Don't you know anything else about the man?"

"No."

"What was this girl Dard like?"

"Small, not very pretty; a street-urchin's face, with a monkey's nose, crab's eyes, flopping ears, and a receding chin."

"What is about her age?"

"From twenty to twenty-five."

"Do you know where she was born?"

"At Paris, or in the neighbourhood."

"Have you got her down in the lodgers' book?"

"Yes, but not under the name of Dard."

"Mademoiselle Xoru took a school-copybook out of her chest of drawers, and, opening it, pointed to some writing, saying: "Look, that's her name."

I read: "Gaupe (Mathilde), waistcoat-maker; came July 8th, 1868; left January 7th, 1869. Rent one hundred and fifty francs."

After this interview with the doorkeeper, I went to the nearest chemist's; the shop was still open. The assistant, a youth of about nineteen years of age, was alone. He made no difficulty in acknowledging that he had been intimate with Mathilde Dard—adding that since she had left the Rue Princesse, he had only seen her once at the Bal Bullier. On that occasion she had told him that she was engaged to sing at music-halls—notably at the Beuglant, in the Rue Mazet; and at the Génie, in the Boulevard Mazas. He added that he knew a tailor, whose christian-name was Pierre, living in the Rue Mazarine, who sometimes brought Mathilde dress-waistcoats to stitch. He was a little man, tolerably well-made, and used constantly to wear a tall hat. I left the chemist's shop with a glimmer of hope.

"The girl Mathilde Dard and the tailor Pierre," thought I, "are perhaps the key to the enigma. I must see them—first the woman, then the man. The well, the girl, the tailor, seemed to be connected."

My first guiding-thread was taking shape.

CHAPTER VIII.

MADEMOISELLE GAUPE.—THE MARK + B + TAKES A NAME.

"You have heard something fresh?" asked my secretary, on seeing me enter the office the following morning.

"How do you know, Monsieur Leroy?"

"I can tell it by your face. You look less anxious than usual this morning. Has your visit to Mother Michel cast any light on this mystery?"

"Maybe. In the meanwhile, take your hat, and carry this report, relating to the incident which happened at the Odéon Theatre in connection with the Ministerial box, to the chief private secretary. Then call upon Monsieur Mettetal, the chief of the first division, and hand him this letter. I am sending him some inquiry-bulletins connected with the detective and public morals departments, and those charged with the supervision of lodging-houses, passports, certificates and licences, hospitals, and prisons. These bulletins refer to a girl named Mathilde Gaupe, alias Dard, twenty to twenty-five years of age, born at Paris or the neighbourhood, a former waistcoat-maker, now singing at music-halls. I must find that girl at all costs. Ask them to expedite their researches, which need not go further back than the 8th of January last. Try to be present when they are consulting the lodging-house records. The clerks, connected with that branch, being few in number and overworked, sometimes only imperfectly investigate matters."

My secretary started off at once. At half-past eleven he returned. The following details had been found registered:—

"Mathilde Gaupe, twenty years of age, born at Belleville, in the Department of the Seine, August 2nd, 1847, waistcoat maker, received her certificate December 21, 1867, on proof of identification furnished by Monsieur Nauré, tailor, Rue de Vaugirard, with whom she served her apprenticeship." In the office for the supervision of lodging-houses, the following particulars were obtained:—"Mathilde Dard,

lyrical artiste, arrived yesterday, Tuesday, February the 2nd, at the Hotel Racine, in the street of the same name."

"She is there still," said my secretary, "for I consulted their police-register, on my way back."

"Then have her brought here by one of the inspectors we have at our disposal, and in the meanwhile let us finish off that matter of the forged banknotes so that we may be at liberty to examine the girl Gaupe's position and connections."

At two o'clock, one of the inspectors brought the person in question; he had unearthed her playing dominoes with some students at the Café de la Jeune France, on the Boulevard Saint-Michel. On entering my private office, Mademoiselle Gaupe bowed like an artiste—that is to say, in an easygoing manner. I examined her. Mother Michel's description had been somewhat overdrawn, but yet it was correct in the main—short black hair, curling naturally and falling over a prominent forehead; bushy brown eyebrows very much arched; round bright eyes of a greyish colour, well open and ever on the alert; a little turned-up nose; a medium-sized mouth with thin lips; rather big teeth, but very white and even; a short, round chin; turned-back ears, almost drooping, and large enough to hear everything without blushing; a rather bright complexion. There was nothing handsome or regular about the features when taken in detail, but it was on the whole an original and intelligent-looking head. She was loud in her speech, and her ways were somewhat masculine, but without being vulgar. A good-natured smile hung about her lips and seemed to be habitual with her. Her naturally-unstudied manner, without any kind of personal pretentiousness, indicated a disposition to satisfy every caprice and whim. She was a Grévin all over.

Without awaiting my questions, Mademoiselle Gaupe addressed me thus: "You wish to see me, Mr. Commissary?"

I replied by an affirmative nod of the head. She continued: "No doubt to scold me for having sung last night, on the occasion of my first appearance at the Beuglant, a new song which did not figure on the programme; but, you know, the censor is not always disposed to let pass,

without a good deal of clipping, the jokes that may be too —— naturalistic."

"No, mademoiselle, that is not why you are here. The Beuglant is situated in the district of La Monnaie, and it is my colleague, therefore, who has to look after it. I have had you brought, somewhat sharply, to my office, I must admit; but, with your wandering kind of life, it is rather difficult to find you two days in succession at the same address. I was obliged to catch you on the wing, having found your whereabouts on the police-register of the Hotel Racine. What is your real name?"

"Gaupe."

"In all the lodging-houses you are entered under that of Dard."

"Yes, I usually assume that name, and this is the reason: A friend of mine, a law-student, told me that the word Gaupe means a dirty, disagreeable woman. As my pretentions are quite in an opposite direction, I changed my name, I have adopted that of Dard—it sounds better."

"You sing at music-halls?"

"At so much a night—I have even met with some success at the Beuglant, in the Rue Mazet, and at the Génie on the Boulevard Mazas. I don't think that I have any actual talent, but it appears that I give the words in a comic and sentimental tone, accompanied by a play of the arms and legs which brings down the house."

"How long have you been singing in public?"

"Three months."

"Before living in furnished lodgings, you had a home of your own, in the Rue Princesse——"

"How do you know that?—I bet that old jade Mother Michel has been making complaints about me!"

"Not quite that; but she has not precisely given you a certificate of virtue."

"Well, if she has had anything to say about my goings-on, I had better enlighten you about hers. Now that she is old and ugly, she pretends to be very religious; it's no fault of hers if she is good—not so very long ago, she was still soft on old Ripaton, the cobbler in the Rue Guisarde; but that's nothing to the life she used to lead when she was

young. I know people who were acquainted with her in her grand days. Mother Michel, as she is now called, used to go by the name of Modeste—that's her christian-name—but she wasn't very modest, though. The mother of Monsieur Nauré, my former master, used to know her well; they were in the habit of going to public balls together. It appears that Modeste had a grand dodge of pretending to have the vapours, and, when she had got her nerves well worked up, she would gracefully faint in the arms of a partner who looked as though he had plenty of coin. Of course the man would unfasten her dress, and then she would feel worse, and, what with one thing and another, this would of course end in his seeing her home in a cab. My former master's mother even told me that they had been together in a hospital not meant for girls that were respectable. Mother Michel was well aware that I knew all about the pranks of her younger days; consequently, she had only one thing in view, and that was to get me turned out of the house. Oh! the jade!"

"Come, mademoiselle, suppose we drop Mother Michel and her pranks, and come to the matter which requires your presence here."

"I am ready to answer you frankly; question me about what you want to know, and if it's in my power, I will give you the information you require. I am not like a good many of my companions—I don't hate the police, and I don't object to give information, being sure that in doing so I am rendering society a service. Now as I was created and brought into the world to oblige my fellow-creatures——"

The star of the Beuglant was on the point of indulging in a rather objectionable tirade, but I stopped her with another question: "Your occupation as a waistcoat-maker has of necessity brought you into contact with tailors?"

"Yes—with Monsieur Nauré, with whom I served my apprenticeship, and who at the same time was my first lover. I was placed with him out of charity. For six years I worked pluckily; I may honestly say that my heart was in my work. All I wanted was to become a good and respectable workwoman, and then to marry some decent lad in the same way. That was the dream of my early

youth; but woman proposes and man disposes. My master, having become a widower, began to talk to me in a language I could not understand. He spoke to me of solitude, duty, gratitude, devotion; at last he brought out all those fine words of which I now know the value. He wept like a calf!—the old crocodile! Catch me trusting any more such easy tears! But at that time I was only eighteen, I had no experience of life and no mother to advise me. I yielded to his prayers and his fears without feeling the slightest affection for him.

"After a year I had had quite enough of the life I was leading with him. Being by no means loving, only selfish and jealous, he made my life unbearable. So one fine day I gave him the slip, and went to live with one of his customers, a little student of chemistry, and who was besides very—chemical. I still kept on working at the dress-waistcoats for some time; then, becoming intoxicated with my visits to the Latin Quarter, I gave way to a pleasant feeling of laziness and dropped work altogether. Being gifted with a passable voice and having a head out of the common, together with a certain amount of 'go' in my ways, and a knack of saying funny and sometimes original things, the students made much of me, because of my easy good nature. Not wishing to sell myself, and objecting to be dependent on anyone, I began to sing at music-halls. As I don't coo so very badly, I earn a tolerable kind of living, without injuring a soul. I am free, independent, and prosperous. That is my story, sir."

"You are, no doubt, aware, mademoiselle, that, at your former home in the Rue Princesse, there is a well in which two legs have been found?"

"I read all about it in the papers, and I thought about Mother Michel, who must have been as disagreeable as a first wrinkle on a pretty face. But what a strange idea to put a couple of legs to soak in a well, considering how easy it would have been to throw them into the Seine, where they would have had so much more room to move about in! Perhaps you had an idea that those legs were mine?"

"At all events, I have no longer any occasion to think so now. All I want is to know the names of the tailors you worked for after leaving your first employer."

"They are Messrs. Renoul, Durand, Martin, Voirbo and Cartier."

"Who was it that used to bring you your water up occasionally, when you were living in the Rue Princesse?"

"That was Voirbo."

"Where does he live?"

"Before he married, he used to live on the third floor of a house in the Rue Mazarine—I can't remember the number, but it is next door to a house of ill-fame, nicknamed the 'Truss of Straw.' Voirbo left there to get married, and I don't know where he hangs out now."

"Is there a doorkeeper at the house where he lived?"

"No, the place is looked after by a married couple called Bethmont. I remember the name because it happens to be the same as that of one of my cousins, a fine fellow."

"Who will draw at the next conscription?"

"That's him—but how do you happen to know about it?"

"From your old doorkeeper, who told me in connection with the matter how you pulled some black hair out of the tip of her cat's tail."

"So she's still after me, the spiteful old thing?"

"What was that Monsieur Voirbo's way of living?"

"Rather a puzzling one. He worked but little, lounged about a good deal, and led a pretty fast life."

"And what were his means?"

"I never knew. He was a very strange man; he always had money, even gold I may say; he frequented loose women and gambling-hells, often lost at cards, and was, above all, full of politics. I remember his taking me one evening to a public meeting, where he really made a very good speech. He got quite as much applause as I do at the Bouglant when I sing my best songs."

"Was this Voirbo your lover?"

"Yes, but so little that he hardly counts. I should not remember him if he wasn't mentioned."

"Were you not likewise intimate with a chemist's assistant?"

"Yes, one used to come to my little room in the Rue Princesse. When I was alone of a morning, he was in the habit of bringing me some bicarbonate, in a small box,

to clean my teeth with. I used to pay the little fellow, of course, for his trouble—just think, five flights of stairs to get up, and which he often had to go down again without stopping!"

"Did Voirbo employ any workmen?"

"Never!—he didn't even employ himself; what he liked best was to make women work."

"Do you remember his having any special mistress?"

"He preferred to have several—it brought him in more."

"Had he a maidservant or anybody living with him?"

"A widow—the only woman, I think, who ever came in contact with him without becoming his mistress—used to come on Thursdays to put the place to rights and mend his clothes."

"Do you happen to know that person's address?"

"I neither know her name nor her address, but she must be known to the people who have charge of the house."

"Had Voirbo any relatives in Paris? Did he ever mention his family to you?"

"There was never a question of that between us, I have even noticed that he avoided all personal matters. I have never heard him utter the words 'father,' 'mother.' I have an idea he was a foundling."

"Do you know any of his customers or friends?"

"No, but I have often seen him at the café with a little old man, a rather common-looking person, who behaved rudely towards me in public. Besides, I don't like old men, and that's the fault of my former master, Nauré. In spite of all kinds of offers of dresses, dinners, tickets for the play, I paid no attention to the offers of Voirbo's friend, who, I think, used to live in the Rue Dauphine—I forget the number."

"What was the man's social status?"

"He was independent. Voirbo was always saying to me: 'You are wrong to object to my friend; he won't deceive you, he won't. He's got plenty of money; and, though his stinginess to men is well known, his generosity towards women is proverbial, especially in the case of women who, like you, have plenty of go.'"

"Did you know the man's name?"

"I think I remember that, in spite of the great difference in years between them, Voirbo used to address him very familiarly by the name of Désiré."

"When did you see him last?"

"About two months ago. It was at the Beuglant. After I had sung my song, I went round with the plate. I passed before him, he dropped half a franc into it. That's the usual tip with lovers: they only are capable of such generosity. Silver is tantamount to a declaration. Luke-warm lovers give half a franc; those who are red-hot, five francs; gold you never see; but the two-sou-piece is the general tip. Intimate lovers alone take no notice either of the plate or of the singer. Voirbo, who was with his friend, gave nothing, but, just as I was passing near him, introduced me, made use of some gross remark, as was his way, and then to an elderly lady seated between him and Désiré: 'This is Mother Bandage, my friend's aunt; if ever you want suspenders to preserve you from falls—artistic ones of course—you can't do better than give madame a call in the Rue de Nesles, where she is well known, as also in the neighbourhood.' I went off without paying any attention to this impertinence."

"One moment, mademoiselle, if you please. For reasons you shall know later on, it is absolutely necessary for me to find the little old man you speak of, without applying to Voirbo, for the present, about him. I am going to have inquiries made to discover whether Mother Bandage really lives in the Rue de Nesles, and, if so, have her brought here forthwith."

"As you please, sir—need I wait any longer?"

"That is indispensable, in order to identify her."

In accordance with my instructions, police-constable Ringué went to the Rue de Nesles. Half an hour later he came back accompanied by the Widow Bodasse, well-known under the nickname of Bandage. Mademoiselle Gaupe recognised her at once; she was indeed the same person whom Voirbo had introduced to her. Madame Bodasse informed me that she was sixty-six years of age, that she followed the occupation of a bandage manufacturer, and that her address was No. 9, Rue de Nesles.

"I am called Mother Bandage because of my occupation, and I am hardly known by any other name. I have dwelt close upon half a century in the same street."

"I am told you are the aunt of a person named Désiré?"

"Yes, I have a nephew, Désiré Bodasse, older than I am; he is, however, only a nephew by marriage, on my husband's side."

"What occupation does he follow?"

"He used to be a journeyman upholsterer; now he has sufficient to live on, and no longer works."

"Where does he live?"

"In the Rue Dauphine, No. 59."

"When did you see him last?"

"More than a month ago."

"And have you not felt anxious about him?"

"By no means, for he often goes away without mentioning anything about it; sometimes he is away from home for a fortnight or a month. He goes, comes, travels, and stays with friends in the country, as it suits him. Two years ago, he spent six weeks in a hospital, under a false name and address."

"Why did he give a false name and address?"

"Through stinginess, sir, in order not to have to pay the expenses of his stay and treatment at the hospital."

"Are you friendly with him?"

"We are not bad friends, but he is selfish, careless, and, being no scholar, he never writes."

"Is he married, a widower, or a bachelor?"

"Married; but long since separated from his wife. From the first days of their union, my niece complained of his infidelity; it appears that he was in the habit of going after the work-girls. After a good deal of argument, they separated by mutual consent. He remained in Paris, whereas she went to live in the country with her friends."

"Has Désiré Bodasse any other relations besides yourself?"

"Two little cousins, one of whom resides in Paris in the Rue Git-le-Cœur, and the other at Fontenay-aux-Roses."

"Does your nephew often receive company at his home?"

"I don't think so. He waits on himself, takes his wash-

ing to the laundress, fetches it away again; in a word, he lives quite an eccentric life."

"What is the nature of his means?"

"He must have an income of from fifteen to eighteen hundred francs in bonds, payable to bearer. Most of them are deposited at a banking-house, but I can't tell you which one. He must have the remainder at home or else about his person, for he is mightily afraid of thieves. He used to draw his own dividends, so as to avoid having to pay commission."

"Were you in the habit of going out with him?"

"Sometimes to a music-hall or theatre, especially in the winter; and in the summer to some of the fêtes round about Paris. In that sort of thing, he was never close with me."

"Which were the cafés he frequented the most?"

"The Mazarin, the Belge, the Beuglant, situated in the Rue Dauphine or the neighbourhood."

"What was the occasion of your last outing with your nephew?"

"Sunday, the 13th of December; he took me to the Beuglant, in the Rue Mazet, where his tailor and friend, Pierre, was waiting for him. We stopped till about midnight. Désiré saw me home. The next day, towards four o'clock, he came for his spectacles, which he had left on my table; he wished, he said, to have blue glasses put in them by a spectacle-maker on the Quai de Conti. I have seen nothing of him since."

"It was also on Sunday, the 13th of December," said Mademoiselle Gaupe, "that I saw this lady at the Beuglant with Pierre and Désiré. I remember the date perfectly well, because it was my farewell performance. On the following day, I was to make my first appearance at the Génie, with a new song."

Having no further questions to ask these ladies, I dismissed Mademoiselle Gaupe, inviting her to return to my office the following day at two o'clock. "Above all, not a word to anyone about the conversation we have had, or what you have heard here."

Mademoiselle Gaupe having taken her departure, I sent for a conveyance, into which I got with Madame Bodasse. A quarter of an hour later we alighted at the

Morgue and entered its gloomy portals. The person in attendance brought into the office the sealed parcel which I had made up of the pieces of stuff covering the legs that had been found in the well. Madame Bodasse unhesitatingly recognised the remnant of iron-grey cloth as having belonged to her nephew and forming part of a pair of trousers which had been made by Pierre, Désiré's friend and tailor; also the socks which bore the mark + B + and which had been lengthened by the legs of a pair of stockings. She herself had made the aforesaid mark with some red cotton, and had joined the stockings to the socks at her nephew's request, he being a very chilly person. Widow Bodasse added that her nephew had a very distinct scar on his right leg, the result of a wound he had received quite recently by falling on a piece of broken bottle. He had himself attended to this wound, and probably still had at home the phials which had contained the special lotion prepared by the chemist in the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts. Doubt was now out of the question: one of the legs found in the well bore a very decided scar and the pieces of human remains found in different places belonged, no doubt, to the body of Désiré Bodasse, murdered by ——. As yet I dared not utter the murderer's name, which was already on the tip of my tongue. I next produced for Madame Bodasse's inspection the piece of blue jersey, edged with a black border, which had contained the human thigh found near the Pont-des-Saints-Pères.

"That is the edging I sewed to my nephew's jersey—I recognise it."

I next went to the Public Prosecutor's office. Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, the examining magistrate, had just been called elsewhere for some grave case. I left a letter for him which I hurriedly wrote in his office; then I went in search of the Public Prosecutor himself, to whom, with a view of avoiding any indiscretion that might embarrass our future researches, I gave a verbal account of the new facts which had just come to light. I did the same at the Prefecture of Police, and then went straight to Désiré Bodasse's residence, No 59, Rue Dauphine.

At this address there exists a house which is more than two hundred and fifty years old. Admittance is gained to

it by pushing open a small lattice gate, about a yard in height, to which is affixed a board bearing the following inscription :—"The doorkeeper is a tailor: clothes made and mended." Behind this gate, which serves the purpose of a door, a rather long passage leads to a staircase. The doorkeeper's room is on the first floor. The door was open and a man was sitting cross-legged on his bench mending some garment. Seated near him, a woman was paring some potatoes.

"Those are the Beaudelocqs," said Widow Bodasse, "I have known them a long time. Everybody respects them; you may trust them. They have a little boy, a love of a child, and they dote on him."

I asked the guardians of the house if Monsieur Désiré Bodasse was at home.

"I don't know," replied the woman.

"What floor does he live on?"

"The third on the right, at the entrance to the passage."

"That is indeed where my nephew resides," remarked Widow Bodasse, showing me the door just mentioned.

I knocked several times. No reply. Returning to the doorkeeper's room, I informed them who I was. Beaudelocq's wife explained that the position of their room did not always permit them to see the persons ascending or descending the stairs. To this she added:

"At night, as soon as the front door is closed, lodgers are supposed to give their names on entering, but all do not comply with this regulation, and Monsieur Bodasse, the oldest lodger we have, belongs to the number. Sometimes he may give his christian-name, but more frequently he passes by without saying anything; we know him, however, by the way he drags his cane up the stairs. Monsieur Bodasse is a singular and rakish old man. Sometimes he locks himself in, and for two or three days won't answer anyone. When a letter comes for him, which is a rare occurrence, we shove it under the door, in accordance with his instructions."

"Bodasse," the tailor informed us in his turn, "never goes out without his spectacles, cane, and tall hat. Sometimes he wears a wig—but I can't say why."

"If you should want him," the woman went on to say,

"he can't be far off; for last night, towards eleven o'clock, as I stood on the stairs and was looking across the yard, I saw a light burning in his room and a shadow appear on his curtains."

"You must be mistaken," said Widow Bodasse.

"By no means, madame. My husband can tell you that on returning I said to him: 'Old Désiré'—for that's what he is called about here—'must have some woman upstairs with him.'"

"That's true," interrupted Beaudelocq, "and I said to my wife: 'The old gentleman receives some very queer company; harm is sure to come of it.'"

"Besides," added his wife, "old Désiré is certainly in Paris, since this very morning, between eleven and twelve, I fancied I saw him just as he was entering the Passage du Commerce. He stopped to talk to a girl. I could not positively swear to it, but I can't help thinking it was him. You know your nephew, Madame Bodasse, and you can't deny that he is an old libertine."

"I know." Then turning towards me she said: "I must have made a mistake with reference to those articles which I identified at the Morgue, since madame saw my nephew this morning and a light in his room yesterday; no doubt he will be back to night."

Hereupon I begged Widow Bodasse to call at my office the following day, and requested the Beaudelocqs to watch for Bodasse's return and to give him a summons which I left for the purpose.

Mademoiselle Gaupe, the star of the Beuglant, had told me that Voirbo resided at the house in the Rue Mazarine kept by the Bethmonts. I easily found the house, which was No. 47. The Bethmonts were wine dealers. My colleague of the district of La Monnaie, Monsieur Allard, a son of the former chief of the detective police, the associate and friend of my father, whom I called upon after leaving the Rue Dauphine, gave most satisfactory information about them, as well as with regard to the way they looked after their house, from which loose women and their bullies were rigorously excluded.

"You may consult them without any misgivings," my colleague told me.

That evening, towards eight o'clock, I entered their establishment, incognito. The husband was away ; and the wife, a very affable Parisian tradeswoman, was serving some brandy to a couple of neighbours, a butcher and a baker, who, after emptying their glasses, returned to their business. When they had left, I asked Madame Bethmont if her lodger, Voirbo, was at home. Voirbo's name struck me as producing an unpleasant impression upon her; nevertheless, her reply was a courteous one.

"He no longer lodges here," said she, "but you will be sure to find him at No. 26, Rue Lamartine."

"Can you tell me if he is a good tailor?"

"I know nothing about him : my husband does not have his clothes of him."

"Do you happen to have known a woman who was recently in his service?"

"You ask too many questions not to belong to the police-force," replied Madame Bethmont, smiling slyly; then she added, looking hard at me for a moment: "Ah! I remember you now, Mr. Commissary of Police. Some time ago, you came to make a search at the second-hand dealer's mother's, in connection with her son, a big ne'er-do-weel who is rather clever at shop-lifting."

"Madame, you have not only a good memory, but, what is more, you are a good judge of faces. I did not mention my name, as I thought you would then answer more freely concerning your former lodger, Voirbo. I wanted to learn your opinion of him, and, from the words you have just uttered, I gather that the man has not secured your esteem."

"Not exactly. His morality was far from being what it should have been. However, he is married now; the present should help us to forget the past."

"But the past may weigh heavily on the present."

"Have you anything serious against him?"

"Perhaps—but as yet I have only suspicions."

"In connexion with his marriage?"

The hesitation with which Madame Bethmont uttered the word "marriage" struck me, and I remained convinced that there was something wrong about it.

"Partly that and partly something else," I replied to Madame Bethmont. "I am anxious to become enlightened

as to his mode of life, his means of existence, and the reasons which induced him to contract this marriage."

"Judging from the way you lay stress on that word, you do not seem to be greatly convinced as to the validity of this new union on the part of Voirbo."

"Not much, I own—but let me tell you frankly, madame, that you yourself seem to have greater doubts on the subject than even I."

"That is true; I have always had an idea that his Englishwoman is still alive; he told me, however, she was dead—besides, the marriage of a Frenchman performed in London is not as a rule binding. Whether his English wife be living or dead, Voirbo is none the less free."

"You are mistaken, madame; a good many Frenchmen have had the same idea and have found out their error. At the present moment, the marriage question is the one I am least interested in. What I want is to find the woman who used to look after Voirbo's place, a widow of the name of Pertant, who, I am told, is a very respectable person."

"You have been rightly informed; she lives at No 2, Rue Bourbon-le-Château."

"I may probably have to see you again with reference to Voirbo."

"You won't put us about more than you can help, will you, sir? I am already advanced in years, and so is my husband. We are very often unwell, and we intend settling presently in the country. We have no assistants to take the business off our hands. You would confer a great favour by not summoning us too often, without mentioning that you would certainly not be any the wiser," she added, with a smile.

I took leave of Madame Bethmont, assuring her that I would cause her as little inconvenience as possible. At No. 2, Rue Bourbon-le-Château, I found Madame Pertant. She was a person of about fifty years of age, occupying a very modest room under the tiles. I made my excuses for disturbing her at nine o'clock at night, then I informed her of my official capacity.

"It must be something very serious for you to come here at this time of night," she answered. "Personally there is no occasion for me to examine my conscience; honest

people, and, I *may add, honest girls, have nothing to fear from the police, which protects all those that have recourse to it.*"

"In my career, which is already a tolerably long one, I have known none but scoundrels to be afraid or complain of it. The police-force has its drawbacks, but its advantages are very great. Its devotion can't be questioned."

"Tell me, sir, what you desire to know from me, and I'll answer your questions truthfully." Madame Pertant expressed herself simply. and with perfect decorum.

"I am anxious to obtain a few particulars about a tailor, named Voirbo, whose room you used to look after."

"I was not exactly his charwoman; I used to go and work at his place on Thursdays; and, after having put things straight, I used to help him a bit at tailoring—when he did any, that is to say."

"He did not work often, then?"

"As little as possible; and that more for appearance's sake."

"Had he any workmen?"

"Not workmen; but workwomen, and such workwomen! —lazy, good-for-nothing, gluttonous girls; the shameless scum of every workroom. I rather think he employed them only because of that."

"He made them his mistresses?"

"Yes; but only temporary ones, for he never kept them very long."

"What were Voirbo's means?"

"I could never quite make out. He used to frequent cafés, gambling-hells, and consort with loose women; was always spending money, and never known to be in debt. In the summer he would often be away for eight or ten days at a time."

"Where used he to go?"

"I never knew. As a rule he was talkative enough, but you couldn't get a word out of him about his mysterious journeys. Last year, however, he told me that, on coming back from one of them, he was very nearly being robbed by some Englishmen; that's all he chose to tell me. I know that he used to be mixed up a good deal with politics; he goes spouting at public meetings, at Belleville."

"Did he ever have any friends to see him at his place?"

"I never saw anybody but girls on the Thursdays."

"Did you know amongst his customers an elderly man named Bodasse, who had an aunt living in the Rue de Nesles, and whom Voirbo used to call Mother Bandage because she worked for orthopedists?"

"Papa Désiré? Oh! very well indeed. He used to live at No. 59, Rue Dauphine. Voirbo sent me to him more than once. He was his chum: they used to be very close, frequented the same haunts, and were intimate with the same girls."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"No, I was even astonished at not seeing him at Voirbo's wedding, which took place on Thursday, the 7th of January. My former employer, to whom I mentioned his absence, said to me: 'The old fool was to have been my best man, and just as the wedding-day was drawing near he started off on a long journey.'"

"Do you know if there were any money matters between them?"

"I can't say anything about that. One Thursday evening Voirbo said to me, just as we were going to have dinner, when the day's work was at an end: 'Would you believe it, that old curmudgeon Désiré spends all his income on a lot of hussies, and yet refuses to lend me ten thousand francs to make myself a position.' And then Voirbo told me that he was tired of the irregular life he was leading; that he was going to get married and settle down, but that he was in positive need of ten thousand francs to start housekeeping upon, and that he still reckoned upon getting them from old Désiré. 'I bet you,' he added, 'that that old mollycoddle will upset my marriage. As it is things are not over smooth. My intended seems more disposed to enter a convent than come to my arms.'"

"Do you happen to know the young lady and her relations?" I asked further.

"Slightly. Her parents were tailors in the Rue Bonaparte. They both died after a long illness, leaving their only daughter about fifteen thousand francs. This girl, being of a thoughtful, melancholy disposition did not seem disposed to get married. Her father was a bit of a Liberal, and Voirbo, in his capacity of a speaker at public meetings,

had gained his sympathy. This man, who knew how to talk, was very particular in his behaviour, was a good-looking steady workman—when it suited him that is, played his cards so well with the young lady, that he succeeded in marrying her. He might have continued his father-in-law's business, but he preferred leaving the neighbourhood, where his old pranks were too well known. As he used to say, he had cast his skin."

"Did he really love the girl?"

"I don't think so. He married her through pride: he had sworn to snatch Mademoiselle Rémoudé from the grip of a parcel of fellows who wanted to get hold of her for her nest-egg. 'The rule of the priests is at an end,' he used to add emphatically: 'I would sooner see Adélia dead than living in a convent.'"

"I now know what to think of Voirbo," said I, preparing to take leave of Widow Pertant.

"He has been doing something very serious then? Politics I suppose?"

"Not at all—politics have had nothing to do with the visit I am paying you."

"Then it must be his first wife who is trying to make things warm for him—that would be very hard for his new wife—so good and young. You know, the Englishwoman, though she was pretty, was not of much account; she was a thief. Voirbo himself told me that she had committed suicide in a New York prison; but I thought all along she was still alive."

"If your former employer has nothing to do with the matter I am now investigating, I purpose leaving him alone for a while respecting his first marriage—but only on the express condition that, if you happen to come across him, you will not tell him I have been inquiring about him. Any indiscretion on your part would place me under the necessity—in order to justify the investigations I am making on his score—of going into the matter of the validity of his marriage in London."

"You may be easy, I shall not say a word."

CHAPTER IX.

DÉSIRÉ BODASSE'S ROOM.—THE LIVING IN THE HOME OF THE DEAD.

On the Thursday, the 4th of February, Madame Beaudelocq, the doorkeeper, and Widow Bodasse appeared at my office at nine o'clock. The latter was upset. The more she had thought the matter over, the more certain she felt she had recognised her nephew's things at the Morgue. How then could the doorkeepers have seen anyone on the previous night in Désiré's room? This was impossible; they must have been mistaken. On catching sight of Madame Beaudelocq, who had arrived first, the bandage-maker of the Rue de Nesles went quickly up to her, saying:

"The statement you made yesterday, madame, is a very surprising one. Are you positive there was a light in my nephew's room the day before yesterday?"

"Quite positive. His room was lit up from eight till eleven o'clock in the evening. My husband as well as the neighbours can vouch for it the same as I can. It is very likely that, with his disposition, Papa Désiré may have been in at the time of your calling with the Commissary, and that he did not choose to open the door. He may have had some woman with him."

"It's very strange!" exclaimed Madame Bodasse, sinking down in an easy-chair.

"Did you notice anything last night?" I asked, in my turn, of Madame Beaudelocq.

"My husband and I watched in turns; all the lodgers came home except Papa Désiré. This morning we knocked at his door, but in vain, and when I started to come here he had not put in an appearance. I told my husband to detain him, should he chance to come home during my absence."

"So that you were consequently unable to hand him my summons. Have you brought it back?"

"No. Before going to bed last night Beaudelocq slipped it under his door."

"Did you keep a light burning all last night?"

"We lit a nightlight, and no one could have entered or gone out without our knowing it. Twice I went down to shut the street-door, which had been left open by some slovenly lodgers."

"At what time in the evening did you shut this door?"

"At ten o'clock, the usual time at this season of the year."

"Can anybody easily hide in your place?"

"Yes, in the passages on the right and left hand sides of every landing, as they are rather dark."

"So that a person well acquainted with the premises might enter towards dark, hide for awhile, then make off without disturbing you, by taking advantage of the ingress or egress of one of the lodgers?"

"Such a thing would be difficult, but yet possible."

"I will draw up two separate reports of your depositions; then we will adjourn to Désiré Bodasse's abode, to find out if possible what has befallen him. His present strange position has already lasted too long. It is now necessary to clear up the doubts surrounding his life or death. A visit to his domicile has become absolutely necessary. It is incumbent upon us to find out whether the man is dead or alive. Perhaps I may find in his room some explanation of the light that you saw there the night before last, and which has still added to this mystery."

Widow Bodasse's and Madame Beaudelocq's evidence having been taken down, we now go at eleven o'clock in the morning, and for the second time, to the abode of Désiré Bodasse. There exists another door at the end of the right-hand passage on the third floor; nevertheless Désiré's room is an isolated one. In the absence of a bell, we knock several times on the door. No one answers. We knock louder. Same silence. We listen attentively, and hear neither footsteps, noise, sighs, nor groans within.

For a moment we keep still, and without touching the door, the panel of which is lit up by a small spirit-lamp held by Madame Beaudelocq. On this panel, dirtied by time,

we notice some writing in chalk. This door is a species of letter-box. There are both questions and answers, most of them effaced. In the midst of letters and figures, we observe a sentence distinctly legible. On spelling each word we succeed in reading:

"I shall not come again. ALINE. Friday."

On reading this inscription over again, it clearly strikes us that no kind of attempt has been made to rub it out. Madame Bodasse and the doorkeeper declare that they are unacquainted with any person named Aline having dealings with the occupant of this room. Widow Bodasse again assures us that she has not seen her nephew since the 14th of December. The doorkeeper, on her part, now says that she must have made a mistake when she fancied she saw Bodasse the day before near the entrance of the Passage du Commerce. The inscription we have before us may date back as far as last Friday, just as much as to any one of the other Fridays following the date of the disappearance—that is to say, the 14th of December, 1868. We knock for the last time with a key. The sharp blows of this instrument resound inside the room. And that is all. We now demand in a loud tone of voice that the door be opened "In the name of the law!" No reply.

It being impossible for us to see through the keyhole what may have happened or may be happening inside the room, our secretary goes to the nearest locksmith to summon him to facilitate our entry. Meanwhile, Madame Beaudelocq passes a thin iron rod under the door and draws out the summons her husband had slipped beneath it the day before. The missive has not been opened; nobody therefore, appears to have entered the room since this document was placed there. The locksmith, who resides at No. 62, Rue Saint-André-des-Arts, sets to work. The bolt shoots back at the first turn of his skeleton-key. It had not been double-locked. Before entering the room we request the persons present to preserve absolute silence, and on no account to follow us. And then we enter.

The two women stand on either side of the door, our secretary places himself between them. The locksmith remains in the passage. All are watching our proceedings. The room, as well as two lumber-closets and the cupboards, which

we successively open, contain no sign of a human being either alive or dead. The apartment, a fairly large one, is well lighted by two windows overlooking the yard. The wallpaper is old and the coloured designs are all faded with age. The bed is made, order reigns everywhere; nothing seems out of place. The silence which surrounds us is only interrupted by the monotonous and rhythmical ticking of the pendulum of an old cuckoo-clock, fitted in a wooden case. This clock, which has neither alarum nor any figure of the bird to which it owes its name, is placed to the left of the chimneypiece close to the corner of the wall facing the two windows. At this moment, the hands on the dial-plate point to ten minutes past ten. By our watch, set according to the city time, it is half-past eleven. The small steel chain supporting the cast-iron weight is at the point of ending its course, already three-parts run.

The floor in front of the fireplace is covered with ends of wax-tapers; we carefully pick them up and find there are seventeen of them. We likewise discover a couple of these same matches, still whole, at the extremities of which there yet adheres a fragment of blue phosphorus: these must have been rubbed and missed taking light. On the black marble mantelpiece are two cardboard candle-boxes, each with a label indicating the weight and the maker's name. One of these boxes is empty; the other contains an unused candle. These boxes are of the kind which hold eight candles; one only is still there, the other fifteen must have been burnt. This being so, it now seems proved to us that, out of the seventeen matches, the remnants of which we have picked up, fifteen have been used to light the same number of candles. Close to the boxes are two tall brass candlesticks. On their flat tops we observe a remnant of burnt wick. In the sockets and down the stems of the two candlesticks, we find successive layers of the remains of burnt-out candles which have assumed greenish and blackish hues. These layers have here and there a thickness of nearly half an inch. The candlesticks seem to have been placed on the mantelpiece in such a way as to cast the light on the window-curtains, and make the neighbours believe that the room was inhabited. The remaining candle is one of the kind supposed to burn on an average three hours. We make this

reflection aloud, whereupon Madame Beaudelocq declares that her lodgers and she herself have observed, at intervals during the last six weeks, a light in this room from eight to eleven of an evening; which led them to believe that Papa Désiré was at home.

The disappearance of Désiré Bodasse now seems to us a certainty. Somebody has entered his room of an evening about fifteen times; at each visit this person has used a candle. A slight layer of dust lies on the plain furniture, which consists of a chest of drawers, a bureau, a table, three chairs, and a bed, all in walnut. The same layer of dust is on some articles of clothing hanging from a row of pegs. The room itself is paved with tiles. Not a crumb is found on the floor as evidence of a recent meal. Not a single blood-stain appears on the tile-flooring, the walls, or the furniture. There is nowhere a sign of a struggle, or of anything having been washed. The pots and pans and kitchen-utensils are in their right places in the cupboards; the linen is put away in the drawers; Désiré's papers are in order in the bureau, the key of which is in the lock. His silver watch and chain are hanging from a hook in the wall at the head of the bed. A blackthorn swordstick, which Widow Bodasse informs us is the one constantly carried by her nephew, stands in the right-hand chimney-corner. His high hat, the only one Désiré possessed, as Madame Bodasse also informs us, is hanging on an iron hat-peg with a brass knob. Like the furniture and clothes, it is covered with dust.

These first examinations made, the persons who have remained outside are permitted to enter the room, but at the same time are requested to move about as little as possible, and not to disturb anything. Before continuing our investigations we ask Widow Bodasse and Madame Beaudelocq if they have any observations to make. Both of them are astonished at seeing in the room the swordstick, hat, and watch which Désiré Bodasse used to call "his inseparables."

"If my nephew," added Widow Bodasse, "has left his securities at home he must have placed them in his bureau, which, like my own, has a secret drawer. If you pull the middle drawer right out you will find a board beneath it. It

appears to be fixed there, but it is not so—it weighs down if you press on the furthest left-hand corner. Désiré told me: 'If ever anything happens to me, you will find there all my private and pecuniary matters! It was his hiding-place, and you will probably find there a green-leather pocketbook with flaps and divisions, just like those used by collectors. That pocketbook contains my nephew's fortune."

Following Widow Bodasse's directions, the drawer is opened in her presence, the board is pressed down, a receptacle becomes visible right inside the piece of furniture, but the pocketbook so carefully described is, like its master, missing.

In one of the pockets of a waistcoat, hanging from the row of pegs, we find a letter without any envelope, and worded as follows :—"Langres, the 2nd of December, 1868. Your lady friend is very good, and to reward her she has been promised that she shall spend three days in Paris, after the 15th of January. It is a long time to wait. I intend to take advantage of this journey to bring you one of the little knives they make here. With many kisses, ALINE."

"I know no one at Langres," said Widow Bodasse, "and the christian-name of Aline does not awaken any recollections within me."

It is clear to us that the writer of this letter is the same person who wrote on the door in chalk: "I shall not come again—Aline—Friday." This girl who had come to Paris from Langres must have called several times at Désiré Bodasse's room without finding him there, and at the same time avoided questioning the doorkeepers. We seek in vain for the little knife from Langres, promised in the letter: Aline cannot have seen Bodasse. We take down the watch which is hanging at the head of the bed. It has stopped: the hands point to two o'clock. This watch, an old-fashioned one, is of the kind that go by the name of "warming-pans." The enamelled dial-plate, with Arabic numerals, is covered with a thick convex glass fitted in a broad circular frame which opens by means of a hinge. It is wound up and regulated on the face. The back is shaped like a skull-cap slightly flattened down; it has no hinges

and fits in a double groove; it looks as though it were generally only removed for repairs. On this silver back there exists a blot of ink; and when the back itself is removed, a flimsy piece of paper falls out, red in colour and carefully folded. On this piece of paper we observe written in pencil a series of numbers of Italian Five per Cents. payable to bearer, 1861 Loan.

"My nephew was a cautious man: he has placed there the numbers of his securities. If the thieves have made off with the latter they won't be of much use to them; knowing the numbers, we can stop payment. It is very lucky."

"Not so lucky as you think. That resource may already have escaped us. These Italian securities cannot be stopped in France. They circulate with the same facility as bank-notes; and anyone in possession of them may sell them or draw the dividends without being compelled to account for his possession of them. I trust, nevertheless, considering the gravity of the case, that Messrs. Rothschild Brothers, bankers, and the financial representatives of Italy in this country, will not object to give the necessary instructions to facilitate my search."

In the third drawer of the chest of drawers are two pairs of socks, like those found in the well, with stocking-legs attached. On these, as on the others, we notice the mark + B +. We take possession of them in order to compare them with the other socks. According to Widow Bodasse, her nephew had four pairs, and the fourth pair is probably at his laundress's in the Rue du Pont-de-Lodi.

"Up to the present," she adds, weeping, "I had still some hope as to the fate of my poor nephew. But I see that it is all over now. Two pairs of socks at his lodging, one pair at the laundress's, and the other at the Morgue—that makes the number. I was not mistaken, yesterday, after all; the socks and other things you showed me were undoubtedly Désiré's. Just look," she went on, "up there on the shelf of that cupboard, close to that bundle of papers, I can see some phials which Monsieur Bodin, the chemist in the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts, gave my nephew, as I told you, to bathe the wound he had on his leg."

The bottles in question have indeed contained a lotion for external use, and they bear the address of the chemist

mentioned. Putting together this evidence, and also the result of the examination of the various articles in the room, it is evident that no murder has been committed there. In spite of Désiré Bodasse's prolonged absence, it is certain that someone enters his room of a night and lights it up, doubtless with the view of leading people to suppose that the old man is at home. This person appears to have some interest in concealing the disappearance for as long a time as possible. It is, therefore, important to discover and catch this mysterious being. A careful and skilful watch can alone bring about such a result. This delicate mission is, therefore, entrusted to the two inspectors of the inquiry division, whom we had left below in the Beaudelocqs' room.

We give them the following written instructions:—1st, To remain constantly in one of the small closets situated at the head and foot of the bed; 2nd, Not to leave the room after seven in the evening, except for most indispensable reasons; 3rd, To go to meals only one at a time; 4th, To light neither candle nor fire, to avoid smoking, to abstain from opening the windows, and to move nothing out of its place; 5th, Not to talk, and to avoid making the least noise; 6th, To seize and arrest any person entering the room; 7th, To keep such person there and watch him, and to acquaint us immediately of the fact through the doorkeeper of the house.

In order that their functions may have a legal character, we give these officials the necessary power and right for their enforcement, by means of a warrant to the following effect, which we hand over to them:—

"In the name of the law,

"We, Gustave Macé, Commissary of Police for the City of Paris, more particularly entrusted with the Odéon District, Officer of Legal Police, Assistant to the Public Prosecutor:

"Considering Articles 40, 49, and 50 of the Criminal Code:

"Order and command all officers of the police force to arrest and bring before us in conformity with the law:

"Any person entering the lodging of Monsieur Désiré Bodasse, at 59, Rue Dauphine, third floor.

"To answer to the charges brought against him.

"And request every police officer to render assistance, in case of necessity, for the execution of the present warrant, sealed with our seal.

"Given at Paris, the 4th day of February, 1869.

"The Commissary of Police,

"G. Macé."

Having given these instructions, we continue our investigations while awaiting the result of the watch we have set.

CHAPTER X.

INQUIRIES AFTER DÉSIRÉ BODASSE.—DATE OF THE CRIME.

ON leaving the two inspectors in Bodasse's room, I had strongly urged them to carry out my instructions to the letter.

"Be careful, gentlemen! we are now entering upon the execution phase—catch and don't be caught!"

"Be easy, Mr. Commissary," replied the senior of the two, "we will keep our weather-eye open!"

As I went slowly downstairs, followed by Madame Bodasse, whose stoutness and age were an obstacle to quick locomotion, I said to her: "You told me, madame, that you last saw your nephew on the 14th of December, towards half-past four in the afternoon, and that, on taking leave of you on that occasion, he had mentioned that he was going to an optician's on the Quai de Conti."

"That is so."

"Are you quite sure of the date?"

"As sure as I am alive, and that my poor nephew is dead. This is why:—on that very day, I wrote to a cousin of mine named Nicaise, whose birthday it happened to be, and I remember having added at the end of my letter: *Désiré has just called;* he is quite well, and still thinks himself young."

Whilst talking in this strain, we had reached the street, where the conveyance was waiting for us.

"Will you accompany me to your nephew's laundress?"

"With pleasure; there and wherever else you may consider necessary."

A moment later, and we were in the Rue du Pont-de-Lodi.

"Your nephew is dead, then?" asked the laundress, on perceiving widow Bodasse.

"How do you know?" replied the latter.

"Well, I thought so, not seeing him call for his washing. He used to come regularly every Thursday: that was his

day. He was funny, the little old gentleman, he used to amuse my girls by courting every one of them."

"Could you tell me, madame, the exact date of his last visit?"

"Stop a bit, that's easy enough; I have it down in my little memorandum-book. The very last time he brought me his bundle of soiled linen was Saturday, the 12th of December. To day is the 4th of February, consequently that was fifty-six days ago. I have had his linen ready for him ever since."

I opened the bundle which was handed to me, and found in it a pair of socks marked like the other pairs: + B + I took possession of them in order to compare them with the others. I now had myself driven to the optician, on the Quai de Conti, who stated that his customer, Désiré Bodasse, had left with him a pair of steel spectacles, on the 14th of December, with the request that he would fit blue glasses to them. At the same time the optician handed Widow Bodasse a spectacle-case.

"Your nephew was only a small customer; but I knew him very well. I remember that, on the occasion of his bringing me these glasses, he was accompanied by a person younger than himself and who was very familiar with him. I concluded from that that he was his son."

"My nephew had no children."

"Did they stay long with you?" I asked.

"Only a few minutes. On leaving they mentioned that they were going to the baths. The one I took for the son talked about going to the Samaritaine; but Bodasse replied that he did not like that establishment."

"My nephew was in the habit of going to the Bains du Paon, in the Passage du Commerce. He always carried some of their tickets. He would give me one or two occasionally."

"We must follow up the clue," thought I, and I directed the driver to the Bains du Paon.

Removed in 1876, to make room for the Boulevard Saint-Germain, this hydropathic establishment was at that time one of the last curiosities of old Paris. The chief attendant, whom I spoke to, knew Bodasse well; but his memory was at fault with reference to his last visit. The

oldest of the other attendants, a fellow well acquainted with the ways of the customers, when questioned, replied:

"It is long since Papa Désiré has been here. I have seen nothing of him since the New Year. He used to make me a little present regularly once a twelvemonth; in fact, he was down on my list of those who gave. Look, his name has not been ticked off. He was very regular in his ways, and would always take his bath about six. Last summer he was following some treatment, and used to come almost every day. I think I heard him talk of a wound on his leg."

"And you have no special recollection of his last visit?" I asked.

"Oh yes, I have! I remember that he was accompanied on that occasion by someone younger than himself, who called him 'papa.' I thought the gentleman was his son. Contrary to his usual custom, Monsieur Bodasse asked for a room with two baths, and, as there was none disengaged at the time, he replied: 'So much the better; it is only five o'clock as yet, and I don't care about taking my bath before six, so that my digestion may be completely over.'—'Quite right, papa,' said the person with him; 'your health before everything.'"

I thanked the attendant and said to Madame Bodasse: "At which restaurant used your nephew to take his meals?"

"At the Rabbit's Squeak, in the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours," she replied.

"What a strange name!"

"The people in the neighbourhood christened the house so, because the proprietor, a kind of Hercules and as big round as a barrel, has a way of invariably answering any complaint of his customers by saying: 'That's not worth a rabbit's squeak.' There are some customers who complain merely for the sake of hearing him say it. Everybody is amused at it, and the place is generally full of people."

"We will go and see the man; perhaps he may be in a position to give us some useful information."

There were no customers there when we entered the eating-house nicknamed the "Rabbit's Squeak." The proprietor, who did his own cooking, was an enormous ball of

fat, dressed in the traditional costume. He was unoccupied and standing near the counter talking with the woman in charge of the till, whose face peeped forth from a framework of piles of small plates containing the dessert in season. I told the landlord the reason of my call.

"I fear I cannot give you any information. I only leave my fire to answer any of the customers complaining about the cooking. If the man you are inquiring after was not a complainer, I don't know him."

"But I know him," said the woman at the till, who was the landlord's wife. "Papa Désiré was an habitual diner; he used frequently to come with one of his friends, a man named Pierre, a tailor in the Rue Mazarine. I have seen nothing of them since the latter got married. Besides, he has moved, and gone and settled down somewhere near the Rue du Faubourg Montmartre, and, as Papa Désiré has not been here since, I fancied he had gone with his friend over the water."

"Do they owe you anything?"

"They always paid ready money."

"Consequently you could not, I suppose, give me the date of the last meal they took in your house?"

"No, sir, since their names do not figure in my books."

On leaving the cookshop, I took Widow Bodasse home, and made an appointment with her at the Morgue for five o'clock in the evening, in order to sign there, at the same time as myself, the act of identification of her nephew's body; then I had myself driven to Voirbo's former residence, 47, Rue Mazarine. This man had now become my objective. The vague suspicions I had felt concerning him were now taking shape, and I was eager to become assured about everything. Madame Bethmont, the wine dealer and the principal tenant, once more informed me that she had seen nothing of Voirbo since the 5th of January, the day he removed from the premises.

"He invited us to his wedding," she added, "but we didn't think enough of him to put ourselves out of the way."

"What day did he pay his last quarter's rent?"

"On New Year's Day he paid the quarter that was due in October, as well as the one falling due on the 8th of January."

"With what money did he pay?"

"With a five hundred franc Italian Stock certificate payable to bearer."

Remembering that I had found a list of the numbers of various Italian securities inside Désiré Bodasse's watch-case, I pressed the matter by asking: "Are you quite sure as to the nature of what you state?"

"Quite sure, sir. My husband took it there and then to the money-changer in the Rue Dauphine, who bought it at the market price of the day without raising any objection. I handed the change to Voirbo."

"Do you know the firm that removed your former lodger's goods?"

"He sold his things to a second-hand dealer in the Rue de l'Echaudé, and took nothing to his new home in the Rue Lamartine but his personal effects, his linen, sewing-machine, and his tailor's stove."

Without in the least suspecting it, Madame Bethmont had given me a valuable piece of information. I immediately called upon the money-changer in the Rue Dauphine. He handed me the memorandum of the sale of the Italian Stock certificate effected by Monsieur Bethmont on the 2nd of January. The number of this security was one of those found in Bodasse's watch-case.

"Two days later I sold this security at the Bourse," observed the money-changer, "and I could not tell you who is in possession of it now."

Before leaving the neighbourhood to prosecute further inquiries respecting this security, I paid a second visit to Widow Pertant, Voirbo's former charwoman, who lived in the Rue Bourbon-le-Château. I found her at home.

"You are obliging me, sir," she remarked, on perceiving me, "I was on the point of going to your office."

"Have you anything of interest, then, to communicate to me?"

"The matter is so serious, that I do not know how so horrible an idea can have entered my head; but since you called here, the thought has got hold of me to such an extent that I can't sleep a wink at night. I must disburden my conscience to you."

"You excite my curiosity, madame; pray tell me quickly!"

"If I understood right, you came here yesterday in connection with Papa Désiré's disappearance; and you mentioned to me that nothing had been seen of him since the 15th of December."

"I may have said so, as that is the case."

"Well, Mr. Commissary, it's horrible!"

"But explain yourself, I beg."

"As I got to Voirbo's at eight o'clock on Thursday morning, the 17th of December, to tidy up his place, I found him dressed ready to go out. Everything was put straight, the bed had been made, the room swept, the furniture dusted, and the fire, an enormous fire, had long since been lit, for the cast-iron stove was red-hot."

"But what is there surprising in that?"

"Voirbo was not so industrious as a rule, and he took very good care not to do my work when it was my day there; but that is nothing. What struck me more than anything else, was this: under the stove and all round it the tiled floor was dry and clean, whilst some distance away from the fire the tiles were still damp from a regular scrubbing which they had evidently recently received. I said to Voirbo:—

"'You must either be mad or ill to pour such a lot of water about your bedroom in winter-time.'

"'Don't speak of it,' he replied, 'I was nearly roasted last night.'

"'How was that?'

"'Some drunken fool of a woman called here asking me to mend an old pair of breeches, the only one her husband possessed. I sent her and her old rags to the deuce, on which she got in a passion, kicked up a row, and, on going out, dropped, either on purpose or by accident, a bottle full of some mineral extract which she was carrying in her hand, and the contents of which went all over the floor. As my fire was alight, I was afraid the stuff might flare up, and I hastily emptied my two pails of water on the floor. You should have seen what a mess it made! I can't help laughing about it now, but I didn't laugh last night, I can tell you. The stench of the stuff was so overpowering, that

I was obliged to keep the window open, and to beg the hospitality of my friend Désiré.' And then Voirbo went on :—' You know that his bed is not an over-large one ; but I managed to get a wink or two. I came back here at five this morning, to put the place straight a bit, and I have been waiting for you before going out. A business appointment will keep me away all day. I shall not want you, therefore, till next Thursday, so you'll be a day to the good.'"

"Did you notice the smell of that stuff when you got there?"

"Why the room stunk of petroleum."

"Are you positive it was the 17th of December?"

"I have very good grounds for remembering the date. Voirbo was in the habit of paying me my wages of fifteen francs every month; but just about that time, being short, he owed me three months. On that day he paid me forty-five francs; he had them all ready for me. When I got there, I noticed two pieces of gold and one piece of silver on the table. I made a note of this payment in my little book on the same day: '17th of December, received forty-five francs.'"

"I do not think, madame, you ought to attach too much importance to the incident, which on the whole may be a natural one after all. But did Voirbo ever ask you, during the second half of that month to negotiate any French or foreign bonds for him?"

"I have never seen such things in his possession."

"Do you know whether he has been on a journey since the 17th of December?"

"I am not aware of it."

"Have you often seen him since that date?"

"Besides the occasion of the wedding, I went to the Rue Mazarine on Thursdays the 24th and 31st of December. On the latter day he put twenty francs in my hand, and wished me a Happy New Year."

"That is all I wished to know. Do not mention anything of our conversations of yesterday and to-day."

"I give you my word not to."

On leaving Widow Pertant's, I went to No. 21 Rue Laffitte, to the banking house of Messrs. Rothschild

Brothers, and sent my card in to Baron Gustave. Having been admitted to his private room, I briefly explained to him the object of my visit. He immediately ordered the necessary investigations to discover the memorandum bearing on the Italian bonds, the numbers of which I had found in Bodasse's watch-case. Twenty minutes later I learnt that for the last two years Désiré Bodasse had drawn his own dividends in person, but that coupons for those due in January, 1869, had not as yet been presented, with the exception of the one Voirbo had handed to Bethmont, and which the latter had disposed of to the money-changer in the Rue Dauphine. From the Rue Laffitte, I returned to the Palais de Justice, and informed Monsieur Douet d'Arcq of all the incidents of the day.

"Continue, Mr. Commissary," said the magistrate, "you have made considerable headway in a few days. I share your confidence; we are bound to come to a result."

"Such is my hope. I am now going to the Morgue, where Widow Bodasse is waiting for me to draw up the act of identification of her nephew, and I will bring her back with me here, so that she may make her statement to you."

"As I shall be somewhat late at the Palais de Justice, would it be possible for you to send me, about six o'clock, that portion of your inquiry which may be considered concluded?"

"I will do as you desire, sir."

From the Palais de Justice to the Morgue is but a stone's throw. Widow Bodasse was waiting for me at the office. The clerk produced a form containing the usual formula, and drew up the following document:—

FRENCH EMPIRE. *Paris, February, 4th,* 1869.

PREFECTURE OF POLICE.
THE MORGUE.
No.

Identification of

Name	..	Bodasse.
Christian Name	..	Désiré.
Bachelor ..	..	
Married to ..	..	Magdalene Zéli.

Wid of	
Children	None.
Age	Seventy-two years.
Birthplace	Puteaux (Seine).
Occupation	Upholsterer.
Abode	59, Rue Dauphine (6th Arrondissement).
Son of	Charles.
And of	Marie Dupont.
Mode of Death	Murder.
Cause of Death ..	
Date of Disappearance ..	December 14th, 1868.
Burial	

WITNESSES:

Christian Name and Surname	Gustave Macé.
Occupation	Commissary of Police.
Abode	53, Rue d'Assas.
Christian Name and Surname	Berthe Gérard, Widow Bodasse
Occupation	Trussmaker.
Abode	9, Rue de Nesles.

SIGNATURES:

Of the witnesses.	*Of the clerk.*
G. MACÉ.	(Illegible.)
Widow BODASSE.	

This formality having been gone through, I conducted Widow Bodasse to the investigating magistrate, and went to the following cafés: Mazarine, 26, Rue Dauphine; Belge, 31, same street; Beuglant, Rue Mazet. At each of these three places, Désiré Bodasse was known to the waiters. He used to visit them frequently, accompanied by his friend Pierre, with whom he would play cards or dominoes.

I found Mademoiselle Gaupe waiting for me at my office. She asked me for an authorisation to go to Brussels, where she anticipated an ample harvest, not only of applause. but also of hearts.

"I have now," she was good enough to inform me, "half a dozen racy songs, which are likely to turn the heads of

the young Brabanters. I am growing rather sick of taking round the plate at music-halls, and being a sort of fixture on the premises of purveyors of hot water. In fact, I am getting ambitious, and I now aspire to grace the boards of theatres."

"By all means go, mademoiselle; your presence in Paris is not quite indispensable. Only, be good enough to forward me your Brussels address." The artiste withdrew, delighted.

I now drew up an official report—detailing my various proceedings of the day, as well as the result of my inquiries—to be forwarded to the examining magistrate. I was anxious to see the way in which the two inspectors were carrying out my instructions in Bodasse's room. On reaching the Rue Dauphine, I found one of the two inspectors seated quietly smoking his pipe in the doorkeeper's apartment.

"Why on earth have you left your colleague alone, upstairs? This is not the place to keep watch in."

"But my colleague is not upstairs; he is gone to dinner, it's his usual time."

"An official entrusted with a case like the one I have entrusted you with should have no usual time. He dines when he can, and sometimes he doesn't dine at all."

"That's not the custom in our division."

"At all events, it is so in the detective force. Then I suppose no one is upstairs?"

"No, Mr. Commissary."

"I have already told you that, out of doors and under certain circumstances, it is imprudent to mention the rank of your superiors. Sir, is sufficient. It really is a pity that you carry out your instructions in such a way."

"But, sir, being close to the door, nobody can go up or down stairs without being seen by me."

"Possibly; but you may be seen yourself. The unknown person who enters Désiré Bodasse's apartment of a night may be someone belonging to the house. How do you know that the room has not been entered during your absence? I suppose you have at least shut the door?"

"No, sir, not having the key I simply pulled it to."

"Better, and better still, my friend; you are however, no tyro, and therefore ought to know what is meant by

being on the watch. Being inside the trap yourself it would be easy for you to work it. But perhaps you were afraid to remain alone in the room—that is not very creditable to you. The worth, merit, and courage of a police officer are valued in proportion to the danger he incurs. If fear induced you to leave your post, you had better come along with me; I will keep you company till your colleague comes back."

Followed by the officer I rapidly ascended the staircase, and found the door, not pushed to, but really ajar. A strong smell of tobacco was observable both in the apartment and in the passage.

"I see you have been smoking, contrary to my instructions; look at those ends of cigarettes and tapers you have been throwing down, right in front of the chimney-piece. You have been opening the window too. There is a pin on the ground with which I had joined the curtains to make sure that my instructions were punctually carried out. That was my way of checking. And there are some illustrated papers on the table, which have been taken out of that cupboard. You must have been writing your report on those publications, judging by the fresh ink-stains I see all over them."

The inspector belonging to the political division did not say a word in reply. I glanced at the cuckoo-clock; it had stopped.

"I presume you, at least, noticed when this clock, which has not been wound up, stopped?"

"No, sir, but the pendulum was going ten minutes ago."

I looked at my watch, it was twenty minutes past five. The hands of the clock pointed to half-past twelve. Greatly put out, I opened a window to allow the tobacco-smoke to clear away. I replaced in the cupboard the illustrated papers scattered over the table. Then, sitting down on one of the three chairs, I mechanically rested my elbows on this table, and, pressing my head between both hands, closed my eyes. I remained silent and deep in thought.

The idea of being so badly supported, and the thought that the stupidity and carlessness of my assistants might ruin everything, threw me into despair. I felt the case

slipping through my fingers, and on the spur of a sudden feeling of disgust, I decided that it would be much better to drop the inquiry altogether and to return all the documents to the examining magistrate. It would then rest with him to entrust the carrying of it through to one of my colleagues attached to the judicial delegations. Little by little, my mind recovered its usual calm, and reason once more gained the upper-hand. I then permitted my thoughts to roam over the various aspects of this puzzle which it was my duty to unravel. When thus left to itself and, if the expression be permissible, freed from its material shell, roving thought is apt to go far, it sees before it boundless horizons.

On opening my eyes, my gaze fell on the table I was sitting at, and I fancied, as in a dream, that I saw two men seated, one on my right, the other on my left, the murderer and his victim, facing one another, eating and drinking together. In this room, full, as yet, of mystery, I reviewed the entire course that the inquiry had so far gone through, and I jotted down the following notes on some sheets of paper left there by Désiré :—

"The vast field of hypothesis is cleared. The inquiry is making long strides over ground which is becoming firmer and firmer. A week ago, everything was dark ; to-day, light has been shed in many directions. After having compared this and rejected that, the following inferences may be made :

"Désiré Bodasse is the man that was cut up in pieces. In spite of the absence of the head, the identity of the corpse is conclusively proved by the evidence of Widow Bodasse, who recognises the socks marked by her '+ B +' and the piece of iron-grey corded trousering as well as the blue jersey material edged with a black border. Her nephew had also a scar on his right leg. This scar exists ; and I here find the phials that contained the lotions used for this wound. All these constitute so many material and indisputable facts. So far, there can be no error : *The murdered man's name is Désiré Bodasse.* The motive of the crime is self-evident : *It is theft.*

"Who can have committed, or caused to be committed, a homicidal act on the person of Désiré Bodasse, and followed

it by theft? His wife? That is out of the question. They separated more than forty years ago by mutual consent; since that time she has lived in the country; she is aged; there is no evidence of her having been in Paris. It is therefore a matter of impossibility to attach the slightest suspicion to her. By the aid of certain inferences, it becomes possible to fix, or nearly so, the date of the crime. Bodasse was last seen on Monday, the 14th of December. On that day he was ALONE with his aunt in the Rue de Nesles at half-past four. At a quarter to five, he called at the optician's on the Quai de Conti. He was then no longer alone. From five till seven, he seems to have been at the baths at the Passage du Commerce. *There, also, he was in company.* From seven till eight, he probably, according to his usual habit, dined at the Rabbit's Squeak, in the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours, with his friend Pierre Voirbo.

"Was not this Voirbo the same person who accompanied him to the optician's and to the baths, where they asked for a room with two baths?—the man who called him 'papa,' and who was very intimate with him? That is possible, even probable. Bodasse and Voirbo were very intimate, and were constantly together. From eight till eleven it is likely that they went as usual to one of their favourite cafés, the Beuglant, Mazarine, or Belge. At this point Bodasse's existence appears to have come to an end.

"He is seen nowhere on Tuesday, the 15th, or on Wednesday, the 16th, of December. During the morning of Thursday, the 17th, a human thigh is found in the Seine, near the Pont des Saints-Pères. The legal doctors called to examine this limb came to the conclusion that its stay in the water could not have been longer than two days. Later on, it is ascertained that this human thigh belongs to one of the legs found in the well in the Rue Princesse. It was therefore a portion of Bodasse's body. According to all probability, the murder must have been committed in the course of the night between Monday, the 14th, and Tuesday, the 15th, of December. But where was this crime perpetrated?

"In a house, without the slightest doubt. Now, there are only three houses which can be suspected. The first:

This one, in the Rue Dauphine; in this very room. No; nothing can lead me to suppose a man has been murdered here. But this room has become, and is still, the room of mourning of the murderer, who comes of a night, sneaking like the criminal he is, to light a candle and make believe that there is life in this chamber of the dead. The second: In the Rue Princesse. That one may be open to suspicion in consequence of the two legs found in the well, which has become, as it were, an accessory in the tragedy. But all the lodgings are occupied by very respectable people; that is proved by our inquiries. No; the crime cannot have been committed there. The third: In the Rue Mazarine, the house where Voirbo, the victim's bosom friend, lodges. It is surely there that Bodasse expired, that he succumbed to the murderer's blows. But the murderer has had ample time to remove every trace of his deed. The apartment may have been thoroughly done up; since the 10th of January it has been occupied by new lodgers. To make a search there would, to my mind, be imprudent for the present.

"This person, Voirbo, is seriously compromised. I do not know the man himself, but I feel that he is mixed up in the matter. He is the unknown who passes along—skilful in his combinations, bold in his proceedings, wary, not to be caught. For a time, this man was the lover of the ex-waistcoat-maker, Mathilde Gaupe, at present a professional singer; he was in the habit of carrying her water up to her when she was living in the Rue Princesse. He knows of the existence of the well, and how easy it is to get into the house of a night, without ringing the bell; hence the idea of taking the two legs there. One of these legs was done up in a tailor's wrap. That is Voirbo's trade. Two months before his marriage, he said to his charwoman, whilst talking of Bodasse:—

"'That old fool will prevent my getting married by refusing to lend me ten thousand francs; he is my stumbling-block!'

"In the course of the afternoon of the 14th of December he is seen in company with Bodasse; then the latter disappears, and three days later, on Thursday, the 17th of December, Widow Pertant, on entering Voirbo's lodging at eight in the morning, notices that the room has undergone a

regular scrubbing. On the 14th of December, the two friends went together to the baths, where they shared the same room. Why the same room? On the 1st of January Voirbo pays his rent with an Italian bond, the number of which I find in the victim's watch-case. Finally, on the 7th of January he gets married; his bosom friend, his best man—Désiré—is not at the wedding.

"'He is gone on a long journey,' says the bridegroom, to Widow Pertant, who is astonished at this absence. That journey was his last—the *eternal*, the journey from which no one ever returns.

"Everything now points to Voirbo; but was he alone? Had he not some accomplice? He is too well known in the Rue Dauphine, at Bodasse's lodging, to go there with impunity. I cannot imagine his hand pulling at the chain of the clock to raise the weight—lighting candles at night. The doorkeeper Beaudelocq is also a tailor; he must know Voirbo—perhaps he has worked for him. This requires looking into. By lighting up the room at night, by keeping the clock going, someone was seeking to delay the discovery of Bodasse's disappearance. By these means, any inquiries that were likely to prove embarrassing for the culprit would be averted. At half-past eleven this morning the hands of the clock pointed to ten; they have just stopped at four; it must therefore have been half-past five when the cuckoo ceased to go.

"This clock, the chain of which is a yard and a half in length, is of the kind which go thirty hours at most. In order to keep it in thorough working order, it must be wound up every twenty-four, or, at the outside, every thirty hours. It is therefore clearly proved that, since ten o'clock yesterday morning, someone must have been here and wound the clock up. As it is not likely they came in the daytime, this must have happened last night. The day before yesterday, from eight till eleven at night, the room was lit up. Madame Beaudelocq stoutly maintains this. Who then, if it be not the murderer or his accomplice, can have any interest in keeping this clock going, and in lighting up Désiré Bodasse's room? One or the other of them cannot be far off.

"What ought to be done under the circumstances?

Arrest Voirbo; or simply examine him as a witness? These measures are both equally premature. As yet there exists no material, tangible, undeniable proof. The accumulated presumptions are all crushing ones for Voirbo; but still he can reduce them all, one by one, to nothing. Judging him by the precautions he has taken, this man is no commonplace criminal; he is an innovator, a reformer in the art of crime; he disdains the beaten track, and all that is commonplace. To deal with him in the ordinary way would be folly. A considerable amount of time has elapsed since the night of the 14th of December; he has therefore had every facility, every latitude, to take his precautions, to study his ground, to choose his position, to draw up his plan, to prepare his answers.

"His ground! Marriage, family life. Nothing could be safer or more moral. His plan! He has carried it out: change of neighbourhood, a new home, breaking off all old connections—casting his skin in fact, as he himself expressed it. His answers! They are foreseen. Every tailor uses wraps like the one in which Bodasse's limbs were tied up. He is acquainted with the well in the Rue Princesse; other persons may be acquainted with it also. He was in the habit of frequenting the house to visit the girl named Gaupe, his workwoman, whose lover he once was; but then he was not the only one. He will admit without the least hesitation that he spent the afternoon and evening of the 14th of December with his friend Désiré Bodasse; he will even give an account of everything they did that evening, laying particular stress all the time on the friendship existing between them. The sale of his furniture! That is quite immaterial. The scrubbing of his former lodging in the Rue Mazarine! He will reply to this question with a smile and a shrug of the shoulders.

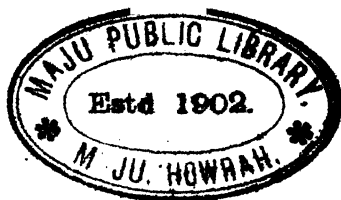
"His first marriage in England has no kind of bearing on Bodasse's case: it is a simple union of no consequence in France. His expenditure at the Rue Lamartine will, of course, be accounted for by the fifteen thousand francs his wife brought him. as dowry. It is true that he paid his rent with an Italian bond which had belonged to the victim; that is a very serious charge against him—a

material, definite, and incriminating fact. But, far from denying it, he will mention it even before being questioned on the subject, and he will go on to explain how his friend and customer, being short of money, gave this share certificate in payment of the clothes he had made for him. And how can one prove the contrary? The corded iron-grey trousers, a piece of which was used to wrap one of the legs in, are thus paid for. As to what he said to Widow Pertant, he will treat that as so much old-woman's gossip.

"Since the discovery of the crime, police-constable Champy has had one fixed idea; he firmly believes that the person stopped by him and his colleague, Ringué, at the Carrefour de Buci, during the night between the 21st and the 22nd of December, and nicknamed by them 'the man with the hams,' is by no means a stranger to the throwing of the two legs down the well in the Rue Princesse. That is a very vague probability, to which there is, as yet, no need to attach any kind of importance. What is required, and that at all costs, are material, incontrovertible proofs; and the only way to obtain them is by continuing the watch in this room. It is here that we must seize the murderer or his accomplice, who, boldly defying human justice, comes like a thief in the night to give movement to this clock and light to his victim's home."

After reading over these notes, I placed them in my pocketbook, intending to forward a copy of them on the morrow to the examining magistrate. The officer belonging to the inquiry division had all this while remained quietly seated in a corner. His colleague had not as yet put in an appearance. My presence being required at the office I departed, once more repeating my instructions to the police agent:—

"Be prudent; do not forget what I have told you, and repeat it to your colleague when he returns. Watch very carefully and observe the strictest silence. You have to cope with someone who is acquainted with the ways of the police"



CHAPTER XI.

MONSIEUR VOIRBO, TAILOR AND INFORMER.

A WEEK had gone by. The watch set in the Rue Dauphine continued to prove fruitless. Whilst giving me every day an account of the ill-success of their mission, the two officers entrusted with it regularly informed their superior officer of all that took place by daily reports. Without giving me any kind of notice, their immediate officer had attached several of their colleagues to them with a view of rendering them assistance. So that Bodasse's room had become a kind of branch office of the inquiry division. Unknown to me, these men were being directed by a corporal, who had not even condescended to call at my office and inform me of the duties entrusted to him. He would have considered such a thing derogatory to his dignity.

Later on I was placed in a position to judge of the conceit, and especially the incompetency, of this wearer of stripes. It was after the events of 1870-1871. Politics having frightened him, he had been moved, at his own request, into the detective force, where, on taking charge of that department in 1879, I met the gentleman once more. I was then enabled to take the measure of his skill and his capacity. Even now I sometimes ask myself how the management of certain cases could possibly have been confided to such an individual.

Whilst, therefore, this watching was being carried out in vain, I had come to an understanding with the owners of the houses in the Rue Dauphine and the Rue Princesse to have the cellars of these two buildings examined and their cesspools emptied. This search produced no results. A boring made in the cellar of one of the lodgers—a tripe dealer—of the house in the Rue Princesse, brought about the discovery, at a considerable depth, of a suite of oaken furniture, in the style of the time of Louis XIII., which must

have been buried there before the building of the house, which was more than a hundred years old. The same kind of search had been decided upon for the house in the Rue Mazarine, where Voirbo formerly lodged. But on prudential grounds Monsieur Douet d'Arcq had thought best to put this off. The cesspool being nearly full, and therefore shortly to be emptied, I had made arrangements with the landlord to be present at the process when it became necessary.

At No. 26, Rue Lamartine, Voirbo's new residence, I had put a few questions to the doorkeeper. She had sung the praises of her new tenant, taking me probably for a tradesman anxious to have business relations with him.

"My new lodgers," this worthy person informed me, "are very nice people; they are most industrious. Their home is a charming one; they have paid two quarters' rent in advance; and I have taken in for them two casks of wine for which they paid cash. Two casks of wine in the cellar, you understand. You need not fear to supply them with any amount of goods they may order. I like the two young people. That's why I recommend them all over the place; they seem such quiet, good, straightforward folk. When they first came here they gave me twenty francs—you understand, sir, a whole louis for myself!"

"I understand perfectly," said I to the doorkeeper, whilst making my bow.

I was quite satisfied in my own mind as to the nature and the cause of the friendly particulars she gave me concerning Voirbo. On my way back to my offices I chanced to meet Madame Bethmont and Widow Pertant in the Jardin du Luxembourg, they were going to pay a visit to a sick friend, living in the Rue Bréa.

"Have either of you two ladies seen anything of Monsieur Voirbo?"

"Not I," replied Widow Pertant.

"Then I have been more favoured than you," said the wineshop-keeper's wife. "I saw him last Sunday evening, about six o'clock, talking in the street with a person whom Madame Beaudelocq pointed out to me as one of your agents, Mr. Commissary. You no doubt know of this," added Madame Bethmont with a sly smile. I always had

a suspicion that Voirbo was connected in some kind of way with the police. My husband has said the same more than once. When seeing him pass our house he used to say: 'That fellow may call himself a revolutionist if he likes, but nothing will get the idea out of my head that he is a police spy. It was only too plain, his absences, his pretended visits to London, with his English mistress, to receive a legacy, as he was so fond of saying—a legacy, I suppose, that got lost in a Thames fog.'"

Whilst Madame Bethmont was speaking, I had become anxious. One of my men talking with Voirbo? What could be the meaning of that?

"Are you quite sure Voirbo was talking with one of my men?"

"I only repeat what Bodasse's doorkeeper told me. Last Saturday night I was talking with her, just outside her room, when, all of a sudden, she said to me: 'Look! there is your former lodger at the entrance of the Passage Dauphine, with one of the men deputed by Monsieur Macé to keep watch in our house.' I turned round and saw Voirbo chatting very familiarly with a stranger dressed in black."

Retracing my steps, I immediately went to Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, to acquaint him with this circumstance. He advised me to end a watch which had become useless, costly, and even dangerous for the successful issue of the affair, and he authorised me to examine the tailor Voirbo, for the purpose of obtaining information from him. I, nevertheless, asked him for a discretionary warrant against the man. Wishing to get a better insight into the attitude and the behaviour of the Beaudelocqs in this affair, I paid them a visit, and, assuming a stern air, I gave them to understand that, in spite of the excellent accounts I had received of them, I had reason to suspect their sincerity. The doorkeepers were dumbfoundered. I therefore went on:—

"You were aware that Désiré Bodasse had as a bosom friend a certain tailor of the name of Pierre Voirbo, and yet you never told me anything about it."

"That is true," replied the husband; "Pierre Voirbo was very intimate with our lodger; he often used to visit

him, but we did not think for a single moment that that would have interested you. If you had only mentioned the man's name, we would have told you all we knew about his dealings with Papa Désiré."

"You are yourself a tailor, Monsieur Beaudelocq. A relative of yours lives in the Rue Princesse, in the identical house where the two legs belonging to your former lodger were found. These two facts, added to the cessation of the nightly visits of the unknown to Bodasse's room, since the commencement of the watch, which you alone are aware of having been set, form a total of coincidences which are much to be regretted. You must understand that, in so mysterious a case as this one, nothing must be passed over."

"But, Mr. Commissary, neither my wife nor I have the least interest in hiding the truth, as the future will show you. Your suspicions with reference to ourselves have no foundation, I assure you. We are honest people, and ask for nothing but the means of living by our work, and to be able to bring up our child." Madame Beaudelocq's eyes were full of tears. Her husband continued: "It was impossible for us to suppose that Monsieur Voirbo, who has only just got married, could have had any hand in Bodasse's disappearance. Besides, as late as last Sunday my wife saw him enter one of the wineshops in this very street, in company with the officer you caught smoking his pipe in our room instead of his being upstairs on the third floor, as you had requested."

"Your explanations are sufficient: I am going to at once withdraw the officers, and I should be very much obliged if you would take up the watch yourselves, and let me know forthwith if you find anyone seeking to gain admittance into Monsieur Bodasse's room. You will find somebody at my office at all hours; the messenger sleeps on the premises. One of my inspectors will give you a call every day, until the justice of the peace comes to affix his seals as required by law."

"Be easy, sir," answered Beaudelocq, "if anything occurs you shall know."

Leaving these worthy people, whose good faith was genuine, I went up to Bodasse's room. After having requested the two officers to withdraw, I fastened the door,

leaving it just as it had been before I had had it opened. When we were back in the Rue d'Assas, I requested the two officers to return me the warrant I had entrusted them with, and added: "The daily reports you have provided me with have been endorsed by your superior officers in the regular way, but I observe with regret that they all amount to nothing. However, if I have been correctly informed, as I have every reason to believe, it seems, gentlemen, that one of you was seen last Sunday night, towards six o'clock, talking, at the entrance of the Passage Dauphine, with a tailor of the name of Voirbo, a friend of Bodasse. That day's report does not mention this meeting. I gather, therefore, that there must have been serious grounds for that."

"It is I, Mr. Commissary," answered the man implicated, "that was seen with Voirbo, but I have no kind of reason for concealing the circumstance. Voirbo is a speaker at public meetings and highly thought of at Belleville. He is very well known in our department, where he often comes to see the chief. Last Sunday evening I met him just as I was going to dinner, and we took a glass of absinthe at a wineshop in the Rue Dauphine; we only interchanged a word or two. All I told him was that I was on watch duty in this street."

At these words I started up out of my armchair, but had sufficient control over myself not to give vent to my indignation. Surprised at my movement and the pallor of my face, the man remained abashed for a moment, and then went on with what he had to say.

"But I did not tell him the exact place, nor why I was on watch duty."

"What is Voirbo's professed occupation?"

"He is a tailor, and works very little. It was my intention to have spoken to you about the man precisely because of his occupation, but the officer from whom we take our instructions remarked, after I had mentioned the circumstance to him: 'Don't think of such a thing for a moment, that workman has had nothing whatever to do with Bodasse's disappearance. Commissaries of police look upon almost everyone as a criminal. Besides it is high time that this watch should come to an end, it threatens to become

an everlasting one. Our chief will settle the matter; he will see Voirbo to-morrow.'"

What I had just heard convinced me that Voirbo was a political informer, one of those abject spies who swarm in every public gathering, wretched creatures ever ready to betray their best friend for a twenty-franc piece. And the man, about whom I entertained such terrible suspicions, was in communication with the head of the department to which the two officials belonged who had been sent me to follow up this case. The wretch, then, was as well informed as myself on all the points of the inquiry.

Oh! how my presentiments were now being realised! I had told the chief of the city police that his political agents would not be of the slightest use in a criminal case; but he would not listen to me, and I was obliged to accept what he supplied me with. Had I but had a couple of men belonging to the detective force—two of those sturdy slaves to duty! They are never discouraged by the fatigues and the tediousness of long watches; they do not mind staying away from their homes a week, a fortnight, longer if necessary, sleeping at times for weeks out of doors, living in the fields without shelter, short of food, silent as the tomb, implicitly obeying their orders, knowing no one—nothing beyond their duty.

The mischief, however, had been done; the next best thing to do, therefore, was to mitigate its extent as much as possible. Voirbo was still probably unaware of the suspicions I entertained respecting him. The watch that had been set in Bodasse's room had not produced the material evidence I had expected; but that evidence I intended to have, and it was Voirbo himself who should give it to me. Before going further, it became necessary that I should see the man, and that I should study him without his knowing it: I should then know when to seize the psychological moment to have him in my grasp.

"If I have correctly understood you," I said to the inspector who had just spoken, "Voirbo is an informer?"

"I think so," was the man's reply.

"Then he may be of use to me, and be able to assist me. He was acquainted with Bodasse; he knew his friends, his likes and dislikes, and the places he frequented. The

discovery of a criminal—of his friend's murderer—would be a matter of much greater interest to him than the political opinions of a respectable citizen." And, taking a sheet of paper, I wrote the following letter:

"Paris, February 11th, 1869.

"The Commissary of Police of the Odéon district begs Monsieur Voirbo, residing at No. 26, Rue Lamartine, to be good enough to call at his office, 53, Rue d'Assas, on Saturday the 13th instant, at one o'clock in the afternoon, to give any particulars in his power, bearing on the disappearance of Monsieur Désiré Bodasse.

"The Commissary of Police,

"G. MACÉ."

I purposely handed this letter unsealed to the two inspectors, requesting them to deliver it to their chief, so that he might forward it to Voirbo.

"I shall not require you any more, gentlemen," said I, on dismissing them, "your assistance, I am obliged to say, has been, if not positively injurious, at all events useless to me. I trust that Monsieur Voirbo's will be more efficacious."

When they had left, I turned to my secretary, saying: "What did I tell you, Leroy, when those men came here? It is owing to them that the case is now compromised. This watch, on which I had placed every hope, has come to nothing."

"You might again ask for men belonging to the detective force," replied Leroy.

"Too late; we must try and do without. Luckily, we have still the two constables, Ringué and Champy. Though wanting in professional experience, they have both zeal, and are willing; at all events, we may depend upon passive obedience with them. Ringué is the incarnation of discretion and discipline, and Champy regulates his proceedings by those of his senior, whom he never leaves. His observations, for a beginner, are by no means wanting in accuracy; he will make his way, that young fellow."

"Both of them," Leroy observed, "seemed to me to have been disappointed at the arrival of those two agents."

"They did not know that the regulations of the service

prevented my entrusting them with such a duty, which they would, however, have executed very much better. Call them, Leroy."

Ringué and Champy, who were waiting in the adjacent apartment, entered my office on hearing the secretary's call. Their faces were radiant. They had heard the final dismissal of the political agents, and felt a burden taken off their shoulders. Since the arrival of those men in black—it was thus they called them—they had remained intimidated; a kind of secret dread had taken possession of them. Ringué, especially, had become nervous, distrustful, and only spoke in monosyllables.

"We are going to have a chance, then, of doing something," he remarked cheerily on entering my room. "As for me, I am hopeful. I saw my old sage yesterday, a man I have the greatest faith in. He assured me we should succeed. That man is a downright wonder. If you only knew how wise he is! Said he to me: 'Your commissary is young and active. I knew him when he was secretary to my friend Nusse. He'll discover the culprit; and the Rue Princesse won't have been called Rue de la Justice, from 1793 to 1815, in vain.'"

"Well, then, Ringué, whilst awaiting the fulfilment of your wise friend's prognostications, I am going to give you twenty-four hours' leave of absence. The day after to-morrow we shall have to make acquaintance with a personage—a former friend of Désiré's—who, without suspecting it himself, may be of use to us. However, not a word must be uttered in his hearing that would make him doubt the confidence I shall pretend to have in him. One must even, if necessary, obey him, yield to his whims, please his fancies, for that man is our last chance of success."

"Very good. I understand, Mr. Commissary; we'll be on our best behaviour with the gentleman."

To this Champy assented by a nod. Both now went their ways, enchanted at the disappearance of the men in black.

On Saturday, February 13th, precisely at one o'clock, Ringué made his appearance in my private room, and handed me a sealed envelope bearing the words "Private. Monsieur Macé, Commissary of Police." Tearing it open, I

pulled out a letter—it was my note to Voirbo. The man was there. I held him. We should soon be face to face, fighting with invisible weapons, and victory would be for the most skilful.

"Ask him to step in," I said to Ringué.

Voirbo made his appearance and bowed respectfully. I was standing at my writing-table. I motioned him to a seat in front of me and sat down myself. Separated only by the breadth of the piece of furniture, we were in very close contact. The bright light coming in through the window fell full upon his face, slightly coloured by a passing blush; he did not move a muscle. With a glance I examined his face and person. Voirbo seemed to me the type of a broken-down stockbroker, or of a commercial traveller in adulterated wines. Thirty years of age, short in stature, rather corpulent, he possessed a full face, dark eyes and complexion, a long and thick nose—suggestive of mental and bodily strength—small ears, strong hands, short fat fingers. His hair, cut very short, was, like his moustache, black. Everything in the man's countenance pointed to energy and will; but there was about him something false, cunning, perverse, which at the very first glance betrayed a thoroughgoing scoundrel.

In order, however, not to arouse his suspicions, I ceased my survey, intending to probe him more deeply in the course of the interview then pending. Relying on the unforeseen, I had prepared none of my questions. I wanted to see my man before coming to any kind of opinion, and then to choose my standpoint. After having asked him, the same as all witnesses, his surname, christian-names, age, occupation, and abode, I put several questions to him concerning his friend Désiré Bodasse. He answered with precision and without the slightest hesitation. His lesson had been well learned. After a few personal reflections on his friend's disappearance, which had surprised and deeply affected him, he added:

"On hearing recently of the sad fate of Papa Désiré and the commencement of your inquiry, I had half a mind to call on you. I said as much to Monsieur X, chief of one of the inquiry divisions, whom I happen to know; but this official told me to wait, because the investigations, in con-

sequence of their gravity and your youth, were to be entrusted to other hands. You certainly have," he concluded with a smile, "taken upon yourself a very heavy responsibility for your maiden effort."

"I admit it, Monsieur Voirbo; and I was on the point of withdrawing when your name was mentioned to me by one of the agents of the political division, whose chief you happen to know. I gathered that you had rendered some little service to that functionary, and I thought that with your intelligence you might also be useful to me. I think we shall easily come to an understanding."

"I beg to place myself entirely at your disposal, Mr. Commissary."

"Many thanks for your kind offer. I did not expect less from you. Beyond his intimacy with yourself, Bodasse had, I believe, somewhat questionable relations with young women?"

"And even with certain tripe dealers," interrupted Voirbo. "He was also fond of frequenting suspicious houses."

"Then, perhaps, Monsieur Voirbo, when coming across this questionable company again, you may, perhaps, succeed in discovering the snare in which, undoubtedly, your friend must have been caught. Devote a few of your evenings to discovering a solution of this mystery, impenetrable up to the present, which is hanging over Désiré Bodasse's death. If, after this final effort, the results are not more satisfactory, I shall give in, and regret ever having meddled with so mysterious an affair. I tell you frankly, Monsieur Voirbo, you are my sole and last hope; what is your opinion of Bodasse's tragical end? I am very anxious to have your views on that point."

"I believe," replied Voirbo sententiously, "in an act which had been long since premeditated and was skilfully carried out. Désiré justified in his own person the proverbial expression: 'Merry as a lark.' But his gaiety was turbulent, without wit, and certainly without judgment. He was too hare-brained. He was also a rake, inconstant in his relations with women. What he loved above all was the *petticoat*, and, to my mind, it was some *dirty petticoat* that brought about his end."

"You do not believe, then, in only one murderer? You are of opinion that there was an accomplice?"

"Yes; a woman must have been mixed up in this crime."

"But that is dangerous—an accomplice?"

"Quite so; an accomplice is not always satisfied with his share—and then! Whereas the man who *works* single-handed has nothing to fear—to say nothing of being relieved from arithmetical calculations; to sow alone is likewise to reap alone."

"Were you in the habit of going about everywhere with your friend?"

"Nearly so. But I always objected to accompany him to the Café du Faucon, in the Rue de Seine, where he often used to go."

"The house in question is a shady one; I know it."

"It is the house of call for thieves, rogues, prostitutes, and such-like."

"That is so. The detective force occasionally makes a good haul there."

"I cannot say, I have no dealings with that department; my functions lie in a political direction. However, in order to be of service to you, and also to avenge my friend's death, I have no objection to occupy myself with a criminal matter."

"I need scarcely tell you that, working officially for me and with me, you will be compensated for your time and expenses. This expenditure concerns me personally. Here are a hundred francs."

Voirbo slowly took the note I handed him, and carefully placed it in one of the divisions of his pocketbook, saying:

"I hope we shall succeed. I greatly regret having kept away from my friend Désiré. Who knows? If I had continued my intimacy with him, perhaps he might yet be alive. But what would you have? I was wearied of a life which, in spite of his age, my friend persisted in continuing. I longed for family life. I married. Sooner or later every man must come to that; it is the only way to make sure of the future. Little by little I propose giving up politics and returning to the right path, that of work, which assures one a happy and peaceful old age. I committed more than one folly in my youth, but in the course of an irregular and checkered career I have not a single vile act to reproach myself with."

Voirbo gradually became excited whilst speaking thus, I was therefore careful not to interrupt him. He went on: "To-morrow (Sunday) I purpose taking the field. I shall continue on Monday. Next Tuesday I am obliged to attend the meeting which will be held in the hall of the 'Folies-Belleville' to discuss the question of the pending strike of the journeymen tailors. You sometimes come to our meetings. I remember seeing you."

"I go much oftener than I care to. Next Tuesday I am appointed to be present at one to be held at Grenelle. Since you are going to the one at Belleville I shall ask the Prefect's permission to take my colleague's place. In that manner we will meet on Tuesday evening, and I shall have the satisfaction of hearing you, not in my private room, but on the platform. I shall have no difficulty in effecting this change. They are rather rowdy up there in the Faubourg-du Temple."

"Belleville is very particular about preserving its reputation as Mount Aventinus. If you do come on Tuesday you shall see some queer things."

"That won't frighten me much. Fifteen years' duty has pretty well hardened me."

I rose. Understanding that I was anxious to put an end to our interview, Voirbo did the same, and, preparing to leave, held out his hand to me. In spite of the part I had determined to play, I could not, for the life of me, hold out mine. This was a blunder. Voirbo's face had grown slightly pale; doubt had sprung up in his mind. To repair my mistake, as far as possible, I said to him, with an air of confidence:

"Be as discreet as you can on the subject of our interview, Monsieur Voirbo. I have every confidence in you, and I now lay your good will, your experience, and your person under contribution."

"You may depend upon me," replied Voirbo, once more himself. "I had always longed for a criminal case as a wind-up to my career as informer. I have now my opportunity, and I give you my word I will discover my old friend Désiré's murderers. All my zeal and devotion shall be brought to bear on this task. You shall be in a position to appreciate what I am capable of doing. You shall see

whether I am not in possession of the instinct and scent that make the detective."

"Why, by-the-by, did you not officially join the police force?"

"Because, being extremely young, I entered the political arena, and became known much too early. I should soon have been found out had I belonged to the Prefecture."

"Next Tuesday, then, at the 'Folies-Belleville.'"

Voirbo bowed and went out by the door I had opened.

"This man is morally what he looks physically, a perfect scoundrel," thought I to myself. "He is profoundly ambitious, a hypocrite, as all ambitious men are; bold, cunning, skilful; there is order in his ideas; he is practical; his intelligence is a bright one; he has, in addition, the most absolute confidence in his faculties. His outward bearing is becoming; his tranquillity is extreme; but this composure strikes me as being less real than apparent. His is not a disposition to be easily foiled; and, if my professional experience had not been aroused, I might easily have been mistaken about him. To pounce roughly upon such a man would have been a most clumsy thing to do, for, with his self-possession, he would easily have slipped through my fingers. And this bigamist plays at sentiment, and talks of the purity of the married state! The murderer believes in family affections, and, on principle, artistically disposes of his bosom friend, Désiré, whose tastes he shared and flattered. This wretch is brazen-faced, boastful, and full of affectation. He wishes to make sure of the future. Well, I rather think I shall assist him in doing so.

"Would one believe it? The fellow blushes at being part and parcel of that gang of sneaks, abettors, and political spies, who are a disgrace beside that brave army of faithful, devoted, and honest servants which composes our city police. And to have such a citizen, so dangerous a criminal, watched! By whom could he possibly be better watched than by himself? Does not the Prefecture of Police have news of him every day? It receives his reports, his visits. He penetrates into its offices by roundabout ways, crouching along its passages like a thief in the night, to reach the apartments specially prepared for him and such as he, and the doors of which can only be opened by means unknown to the majority

of the official staff. 'The authorities,' said he, 'are anxious that he should remain with them a long while.' I can easily understand that; such treasures are inestimable. Therefore, I hope to crown my dearest wish by placing him under lock and key."

Cutting short my reflections, I called Ringué and Champy. The two constables entered my room.

"You have seen Voirbo; make a mental note of his appearance—it may stand us in good stead some day."

"For my part," said Champy, touching his forehead with his forefinger, "I have his likeness inside here. I should remember him twenty years hence. I am positive he is my individual—*the man with the hams*, who said he had come from Langres, and whom Ringué and I stopped one night on the Place Buci, a few days before Christmas; the man who told us that he resided in the Rue Princesse. I shall never forgive myself for not having made him show his hams. I am convinced he was carrying the old fellow's legs."

"You may be right, Champy; but for the present you must moderate your ardour."

"Had it not been for orders, sir, I would have jumped on him, when I saw him come to the door just now."

"At all events, for the time being, and for a few days longer, the man must go free; I have my reasons for that. He must not even have a notion you suspect him. Therefore be dumb whenever you see him come here, for he will return. But you may be easy; the wretch's time will come, and then you will be by to help me unmask him."

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE "FOLIES-BELLEVILLES."—A PUBLIC NON-POLITICAL MEETING.—NAPOLEON THE THIRD A THIEF AND ASSASSIN.

IN accordance with my promise to Voirbo, I asked for and easily obtained the privilege of representing the administrative authority at the non-political meeting, which was to be held on Tuesday the 16th of February, in the ballroom of the Folies-Belleville, 8, Rue de Paris. The "citizens" were about to close the discussion on the question which was last under consideration, namely: "The Free Union of the Sexes," and to commence the debates on the order of the day: "The increase of wages." Since the promulgation of the law of the 6th of June, 1868, a law inspired by the generous desire to initiate the people into the principles of political economy, I had often been appointed to attend meetings of this description. In voting for the passing of this law, the legislators of that period scarcely suspected that they were forging a dangerous double-edged weapon, to attack property, religion, family life, and all the institutions of government.

It has been acknowledged, but unfortunately too late, that this form of new crusade against evil was only of advantage to impostors and men actuated by personal ambition.

On arriving at my destination I found my secretary waiting for me in the omnibus office of the Rue de Paris. At the entrance of the Folies-Belleville, two working men in their everyday clothes, with red armlets on their blue and white blouses, were posted. It was, it seems, their duty to examine the faces of those who presented themselves for admission, whilst pretending to act in the ordinary capacity of ushers. After having announced our rank we entered the hall, which was spacious, well ventilated, and in every way adapted for ballroom purposes. The platform generally used by the band had been suitably

arranged to accommodate the committee. On the right was the rostrum for the speakers. In the centre the president and his supporters were placed, while the Commissary of Police and his secretary sat at a table on the left of the committee. At half-past eight the hall was full, when there might have been present from one thousand to twelve hundred persons of both sexes.

Citizens Nimpo, Angora, and Repus are unanimously elected—the first as president and the two others as vice-presidents, and the meeting being declared open, the President rises, and after bowing in all sweetness observes :

" Citizens of both sexes,—We have to conclude this evening the discussion on the question of the ' Free Union of the Sexes.' "

A Voice in the hall.—" What might be your sex, now ? "

Several Voices.—" Silence ! Turn him out."

The President.—" It is the turn of citizen Bâté to speak."

The latter appears on the stand and commences : " Gentlemen ! "

On all sides.—" Citizens. There are no gentlemen here."

The Speaker.—" Since you prefer it, citizens then."

Several Voices.—" Turn him out ! Turn him out ! He is an ' aristo.' "

Other Voices.—" Give the man a chance. Speak up ; speak up, you there."

The President rises, consults the audience, which, by a show of hands, accords the speaker the liberty to proceed.

He thereupon continues : " I am no advocate of the free union of the sexes ; that means the destruction, the annihilation of family life, of property— "

A Voice.—" You have got some property, then ? "

Another Voice.—" Silence ! Property is the way of bad luck."

The Speaker.—" Nature has its rights."

A Voice.—" Satisfy them then."

The Speaker.—" Marriage is sufficient for that."

A Voice.—" Then you had better marry again if you are a widower."

The Speaker.—" We have all of us the same origin."

Someone interrupts.—" And we shall all have the same end."

A Voice.—"Why that is bottled La Palisse."

Another Voice.—"M. de La Palisse is dead."

Several Voices, humming.—"One quarter of an hour before his death—he was still a living man—"

The Speaker, drowning the noise.—"I am not aware whether La Palisse was alive at the time of his death; but I have read somewhere that Bourdaloue said: 'The surplus of the rich ought to go to supply the need of the poor.'"

A Voice.—"What does he take us for?"

Several Voices.—"Turn Bourdaloue out."

The Speaker.—"If nature has her laws, her regulations also reign."

A Voice.—"Not much regulation in your paté."

The President.—"The speaker said reigns."

Another Voice.—"We don't want any more reigns."

Another Voice.—"We want the Republic!" (Thunders of applause.)

The speaker essayed to proceed, but the interruptions and reproaches which assail him on all sides cause him to lose his head. He makes a few desultory remarks, then becomes confused, flounders, stutters, and disappears, after having fantastically mixed up the mineral with the vegetable kingdom, and animals feeding on vegetation while walking over minerals.

"Citizen Tupou will now speak," observes the President.

"I am ready," exclaims the citizen from his seat, and, after a few strides, he reaches the rostrum, and commences:

"Citizens of both sexes,—Illegal unions are more numerous than legal ones. That proves one thing, namely, that the people prefers concubinage."

Someone interrupts.—"It gives the chance of a change."

The Speaker.—"Prefers concubinage to marriage. As for myself, I like and practice free unions. Our fathers have obtained their rights as men. Sexual desires are in accordance with order, they are the rights of nature."

A Voice.—"Your sister's—"

The Speaker.—"She is not present to answer that impudent fellow, and I forbid any allusion to her."

The person interrupting.—"She can't be free, then."

The Speaker.—"No, since she is about to get married. I

am sorry for her. She is choosing slavery." (Prolonged applause.)

The Speaker.—"As for me, I shall never get married. I love liberty, that is what I call happiness." A dog yelps at the other end of the hall. Some of the citizens do their best to drive him off by kicks, but as the animal takes refuge under the benches, the toes of their boots have less effect on him than on the shins of the lady citizens, who express their dissatisfaction in words unfit for publication. As a result uproar and fisticuffs ensue. Finally calm, relatively speaking, is restored, and the President announces that the last speaker whose name is inscribed to speak upon the question is their friend, citizen Youcrasse, a veteran of democracy.

While applause is being given for this qualification there advances slowly towards the rostrum a tall, lanky old man, with unkempt hair and beard, both inordinately long, and white as ermine that has been dragged through the mire. On the top of his skull a red cap is perched. As this citizen passes close by me I observe that his long, gnarled fingers are provided with black and claw-like nails.

The veteran of democracy pulls off his cap with a melodramatic movement, bows as if he were a king, and, exhibiting his cap, remarks:

"I only take this off to the people whose child I am. You know full well, citizens, that I believe in a Supreme Being, but I have a horror of church-mice." (Treble round of applause.) "I am, and continue to remain, the primitive man, the man of another nature. Never has steel touched my hair or beard. I've been called the original citizen"—(laughter)—"but don't you believe one word of that. For the last fifty years, for half a century, citizens, I have frequently been freely united. From these free unions, the only really natural ones, numerous children have been born."

A Voice.—"A collection of scrubs."

Another Voice.—"Silence! Let the speaker have his say."

The Speaker.—"The children of the female citizens, whose charms I have revelled in, have, like myself, practised free unions, and have, in their turn, begotten—"

Someone interrupting.—"That must be the posterity of Abraham."

The Speaker.—"The Supreme Being blesses large families, and it is the duty of the government to take upon itself the charge and responsibility of children."

A Voice.—"People manage to have more children when they are too mean to feed them."

Another Voice.—"A few take them to the pawnbroker."

Third Voice.—"Or to the Rue d'Enfer, No. 100."

The Speaker.—"The ideal of family life is not a regular life, meant to fatten the well-to-do; it is this: to replace the names of fathers and mothers on the registers of the State by these four words, 'Child of the Republic.' In this way irregularity will become regularity. Free unions mean the suppression of marriage, the end of adultery. The authorities would no longer have to intervene to prove the fault, and to certify, by authentic documents, that either husband or wife is illegitimate." (Long and noisy laughter.)

The Speaker.—"These, citizens, are my sentiments on the free union of the sexes. Having been a witness of the past, I have for the future but two passions—"

A Voice.—"Home and victuals."

The Speaker.—No. One longing and one wish."

A Woman.—"Longing at your time of life?"

The Speaker.—"That longing is liberty. My wish is to see planted in all our squares and public places, a standard tree, recalling the glories of our revolutionary forefathers."

Citizen Youcrasse puts his cap on again, and descends the rostrum, amidst the frantic applause of the assembly. At the foot of the platform he is received by numerous friends who come to shake hands with him. As no one else was desirous of speaking, the discussion on the "Free Union of the Sexes" came to an end.

The President puts the question to the vote, which is taken by those in favour of it standing up.

The entire audience rises, as if moved by a single spring, and the President declares the motion unanimously adopted. Once more the hall re-echoes with applause; then silence ensues, and everybody sits down.

"Citizens," observes the President, "we are now going to discuss another question, not less important: 'The Increase of the Wages of the Working Man.'" (Applause.)

"But another committee must be formed so that the discussion shall be in order."

Numerous Voices.—"No! no! there is no need of it, the same will do."

Other Voices (to the well-known tune of the *Lampions*).—"The com—mit, the com—mit, the com—mittee."

Citizens Nimpo, Arfgora, and Repus retain their posts, and thank the assembly for the confidence shown them.

The President.—"Citizens, the question of the increase of the working man's wages, which we are about to discuss, is a slippery one, and I therefore recommend the utmost calm. I trust the speakers may be moderate in the choice of their expressions, in order not to give the representative of the law any cause for breaking up the meeting. You may depend that he will seize upon the smallest pretext for doing so."

A Voice.—"We don't want any commissary."

The President.—"The speakers for this discussion are in their due rotation, citizens Podure, Chaleur, Lèchard, Voirbo, and Toucourt."

It is Podure who is called upon to speak the first. The citizen advances towards the platform, and proves to be a man of about forty, crabbed in appearance, with dishevelled hair and having a squint. On taking possession of the rostrum, he strikes the rail in front of him with a vigorous blow, and cries out in a quivering voice:

"Citizens! On approaching the question of wages, I think it indispensable to study, in common with yourselves, the solution of many social problems. At this moment there are many straits and much anxiety. The working-man is suffering, the price of his work must be increased. Theories have had their day and shown their hollowness; it is now time to enter upon the much more difficult path of practice. To relieve our sufferings, citizens, you must have recourse to action, to violence." (Prolonged applause.)

I made a movement to rise, in order to give a first warning, but the President anticipated me by checking the speaker and adding: "Citizens, it is only half-past nine as yet. The evening promises to be an interesting one; it is therefore not desirable that the representative of the law

should have any pretext to dissolve the meeting. I have saved you a first warning, which would soon have been followed up by another one. I see no reason for separating as yet." (Applause). "It is now the turn of citizen Chaleur to speak; but I recommend him to be less warm than his predecessor." (Laughter on many benches.)

Citizen Chaleur ascends the stand and, unfolding a paper, reads his speech. "In my capacity of a loyal friend to the people, I am here to defend them, *chaleureusement*" (warmly). (Applause and laughter.) "This plucky people, compelled to suffer so much that is bad, requires enlightenment to put a stop to the eternal war between master and man. Daily bread and education ought to be obligatory for all." (Great approval.) "In order to reach this promised land we must begin with mastering municipal power and keeping it in our hands at all costs. Nothing ought to rebuff us, neither agitation, nor contests, nor persecutions! I, citizens, claim the honour of being the first man persecuted——"

A Voice.—"And the first man elected."

Several Voices.—"Turn that man out who is interrupting. Bravo, Mr. Speaker!"

The Speaker.—"Encouraged by your applause, citiz ens I resume. Society as it is is nothing better than a rotten structure which the first good squall would topple over; it is a disabled vessel, leaking everywhere, and officered by pirates. We are in the hands of incapable, intriguing, pot-bellied individuals who fatten on the hard toil of the poorest of the poor." (Prolonged applause.)

"The miseries and humiliations undergone by the working man, require a powerful reaction; so deplorable a state of things needs a radical remedy—this remedy I offer you. These are my plans and reforms:

"Article I.—Religion, being a school of falsehood, brutalisation and immorality, is, and remains for ever proscribed. (Cheers.)

"Article II.—Capital, having been from time immemorial the leech and vampire of labour, is, and must remain suppressed. Property will be redistributed in equal pro portions amongst all citizens.

"Article III.—The standing army, being an instrument

of despotism, must be abolished: it is a perpetual insult of Force versus Right. Reason alone ought to guide the people.

"Article IV.—The magistracy, a mercenary institution—"

I was preparing to admonish, but the President anticipated me by doing so himself. The speaker at this became angry, waved his arms to and fro, and quitted the rostrum, declaring that "men are yet, in this, the nineteenth century, so many shuttlecocks of the State, whereas the State ought to be the shuttlecock of the people." (Applause.)

The President next invites citizen Léchard to speak, and he thus commences: "Citizens.—I am a native of Auvergne"—(laughter)—"and by profession a scullion in a cookshop, where you may dine for ninepence halfpenny"—(more laughter)—"this does not include the table-napkin."

A Voice.—"Not much chance of getting fat in your cookshop." (More hilarity.)

The Speaker.—"If my hands are fatty, my purse is a lean one all the year round." (Cheers.) "I know about as much of the goings on of politics as I do of India, where I have never been. I can no more understand the gibberish of our representatives in the Chamber, or their performances filled with promises, than I can the prospectuses of quack-doctors full of wonderful cures." (Signs of approval.) "All that is cheap humbug—those gentry just know how to trim their sails. As for politics, I care no more for them than I do for the year forty. What I want to know is, whether, instead of always going with an empty belly, there is no chance of getting even one good blow-out. I swear to you before the Almighty—"

A Voice.—"The Almighty! . . . Who may that be?"

Another Voice.—"Nothing of importance—up aloft."

Several Voices.—"Yes—yes!"—"No—no!"—(applause and protests).

The Speaker.—"The Almighty is neither up there, nor down there, any more than in the hall of the Folies-Belleville—He is everywhere. Without Him, you and I could not be here."

Several Voices.—"Turn him out—stop his talking." Great excitement here ensued, and is profited by to expel a drunkard whose repeated hiccoughs made some of the audience fear an

accident to their neighbours. Disorder is now at its height.

I therefore inform the President that with such a persistent hubbub it will be my duty to break up the meeting, adding at the same time that the speakers who have had their turn have taken a mischievous pleasure in getting further and further away from the question under discussion.

The President communicates my observations to the audience, and suspends citizen Léchard in order to make room for citizen Voirbo. At the mention of this last name there is once more silence. Judging from the deference shown to the political spy on his moving towards the rostrum, it is easy to perceive that his oratorical powers are known to, and relished by, those present. Precise in his ways and manners, Voirbo calmly takes possession of the stand. Before commencing to speak he casts a side glance at me, from which I gather that he proposes making a hit with a view of causing me to entertain a high opinion of his skill.

Désiré Bodasse's former friend thus commences: "Citizens,—I am yet smarting from the distressing influence of a crying injustice done to one of our brethren."

A Voice.—"Another infamy committed by the police?"

The Speaker.—"Yes, citizens—a decent and honest working man has been arbitrarily arrested, accused of stealing a hang—" (General laughter.) "You can readily guess, citizens, that this hasn't anything to do with the gallows—the thing hanged which I am now speaking of is only found in drapers' shops. Pieces of cloth are hung up in rows, showing as much of their length as is possible. These pieces are called 'hangers-out.'" (Laughter.) "Well, one of these had disappeared from a shop, and they accused a 'pumper'"—(more laughter)—"whom you should not confuse with the pumpers or firemen whose business it is to extinguish conflagrations. In the tailoring trade, to which I belong, 'pumpers' are those journeymen whose duty it is to make alterations in new garments. As I was saying, then, just now, they accused my friend, the 'pumper,' in having had a hand in stealing a 'hanger-out.' On hearing of the arrest, I went to get him released. At the police office I was told that two persons are necessary to steal a 'hanger-

out.' One, who pretending to test the quality of the cloth, closely examines the 'hanger-out,' they want to get hold of, and who, like tailors are in the habit of doing, gives a good cut near the fold and edge of the stuff. The cut thus made makes tearing easy, so that the second thief has nothing to do but to give it a pull as he walks by and secure what he wants. 'This, citizens, is what the people at the police office have deigned to teach me. I protested my friend's innocence, and as I insisted an inquiry was made, with the result that the author of the theft turned out to be the chief hand in the shop. As soon as it was discovered that a working man had had nothing to do with it, the master withdrew his charge, and this respectable journeyman was restored to liberty, after a dose of three days' imprisonment."

A Voice.—"Instead of arresting respectable citizens the police ought to give one another a turn." (Prolonged applause.)

The Speaker.—"I would now, citizens, touch upon the question of wages. I am a tailor, I know my business, and I purpose to unmask the abuses of the guild, and to expose to you the master tailors—by no means nice people—of whom there are some eighteen hundred. These gentlemen," (murmurs)—"let me call them by that name, for they do not deserve the name of citizen, which is only becoming to the journeymen—these gentlemen pretend to move us back to the time when the Court of France permitted them to wear swords; but they have reckoned without the principles of the Great Revolution brought about by our fathers, the men of '89 and '93. Those 'ravagers'—that is their new name—won't live on us any longer in their dictatorial way. We will not continue seated on the bench with our arms crossed—I mean to say with our legs crossed." (Laughter.) "We must rise as one man to advance and force our social claims, at the head of which must be placed the increase and uniformity of wages. Why should there be differences and classes in the same trade? Why cutters, breeches-makers, waistcoat-makers, ready-made hands, repairers, pumpers, and apprentices? We only want workmen able and willing to make a whole suit. It is these different classes which are the cause of this breach between master and man——"

A Voice.—"Say monkey and man."

The Speaker.—"The monkey benefits by this to live on us. He thirsts for gold—a passion with all capitalists." (Treble round of applause.) "Workmen, let us unite as one and the same family; let us advance hand-in-hand; let us, like the Romans, make *fasces* of our combined arms; let us break down obstacles. In a word, let us awake! The time for action is upon us, and, since the form of government is a bad one——"

At these words I rise, and, addressing the President, say: "According to the law, you are not permitted to discuss the constitution at any political gathering, and this is one; I therefore warn you for the first time——" (Protests, noise, uproar, immense clamour.)

Citizen Voirbo is anxious to leave the rostrum, but, on all sides, cries arise of: "No! no! Go on! Speak away! W[illegible] masters here!"

After a few moments of disorder, silence is restored, and the speaker continues: "As you have just heard, citizens, liberty of speech is at an end. I will not say anything about that of the press, which is bought up by the government with our money; it is at its disposal and devoted to it, like the public force." (Applause.) "I told you, citizens, I think, on ascending the rostrum, that an innocent working man had been arrested on a charge of theft. If you want to seek for thieves and assassins, you must not do so amongst the working classes, but either higher or lower. This man has been kept in prison three whole days. He had not, however, like Napoleon the Third, *stolen*——" (Frantic applause.)

I rise once more and give my second warning.

A terrible commotion now ensued in the hall, and continued for five minutes. When he could make himself heard, the President explained to the meeting that the agent of authority had been too quick; that before giving his second warning, he ought to have permitted the speaker to evolve his thought, and that in his opinion the latter should continue his speech, unless the citizens present were of a different way of thinking. On all sides is heard to the tune of the *Lampions*: "The speech, the spe—ech, the spe—ech!"

The *President.*—Citizen Voirbo, the meeting wishes you to continue your speech."

The Speaker.—"I thank the meeting and proceed, making at the same time, to the agent of authority, every apology for the fault I have been guilty of in telling you the Emperor was a thief, and in comparing him to an ordinary working man unjustly accused of theft."

And turning towards me, he added: "Understand me thoroughly, as a citizen speaking with permission—when I said that Napoleon the Third had stolen, I spoke figuratively—I meant that he had stolen our liberties." (Thunders of applause.) And continuing my speech, always figuratively, I would remind you that he has not only *stolen*, but what is more—he *assassinated*—the Republic on the 2nd of December!" (Further rounds of applause.)

I rise, and in the midst of deafening noise, I draw attention, in a loud voice, to the regulations of the law. I declare the meeting broken up and put on my hat. It is half-past ten. Scarcely have I done so when the audience mounts the benches, ascends and swarms over the rostrum. My secretary and I are surrounded and jostled. Cries, cat-calls, and insults are directed against us from all sides. I happen to remember a few, and will give them verbatim.

"Go to the deuce with your Badinguet!"

"We'll meet again later on, you dirty ass!"

"Hook it, you calf's head in spectacles! wouldn't touch it with vinegar-sauce!"

"That fellow is a naturalistic poet who is coming along!"

"You have broken the meeting up," shouts a ranter, "so that there might be a kick up—we all of us know the dodges of those police scoundrels! The room has been let till eleven—so we'll stay, whether you like it or no. Come cut it, with that fop of yours!"—(my secretary).

"You have stolen the diamonds of democracy and insulted the people!" roared another maniac, shaking his fist in my face. On all sides arose cries of "Turn the commissary out!"

Without wincing, I contemplated not without a feeling of curiosity, this breaking out of a popular storm. Suddenly

remembering Voirbo, I looked about for him, in this human whirlpool which was surging round and round; but he had thought twice before coming near me. I saw him standing at the further end of the platform beaming with pride and looking at me with a triumphant air, as much as to say: "Don't I know how to rouse them! What do you think of my cunning? See what popularity means!"

The feeling of disgust and aversion which this scamp was already awakening in me, was increased at the thought of the infamous part he was playing in this gathering. Had not the idea of duties to be performed, and professional reticence held me in check, nothing would have pleased me more than to have exclaimed to this multitude, led astray and maddened by their last speaker: "That man is a base cowardly spy! He turns your heads, and in an hour he will go to the Prefecture of Police to give an account of your words and deeds."

But as a slave to duty, I was pledged to silence. Yes, indeed, professional secrets are sometimes hard to bear and truly irksome to keep!

The storm kept on increasing with more and more fury. Anticipating danger to my own person, the President urged me to withdraw by a door on the right-hand side of the platform. This door communicated with the house No. 17 in the Rue Denoyez. I refused point-blank.

"I have come here," I said, "in my official capacity by the main door, and it is by the main door I shall go out. Be so good as to assert your authority as president to pacify this tumult. I have a word to say."

Thanks to his efforts, I soon succeeded in making myself heard.

"Ladies and gentlemen," I said.

"No! no! say citizens."

"Ladies and gentlemen," I continued in a higher pitch. "Permit me to give you some useful advice. Go home quietly, and do not place me under the necessity of having to fall back upon main force."

At these words shouts arose on all sides. "We are being threatened. They want to kill us, as they did on the second of December! We mean to defend ourselves! Down with those asses!"

Another indescribable hubbub was heard. Shouts, gesticulations, calls, hustling, and bustling ensue. In different parts of the hall blows are interchanged to the accompaniment of yells, howls, and shrieks in imitation of all the animals in the Jardin des Plantes. Judging that this recreation had lasted long enough, I dropped a word to my secretary, who went out by the door opening to the Rue Denoyez. A moment after twenty police constables, headed by an inspector, made their entry into the hall.

Tableau !

Peace was restored as if by magic, and the clearing of the place was effected in a few minutes with perfect harmony. I was the last to leave, and the gas was turned out after me.

Thus ended this strange non-political meeting, this pitiful comedy, rightly played in a hall called the "Folies-Belleville."

The officials at the Prefecture of Police were very anxious as to the upshot of the meeting, and at the end of the Rue de Paris I encountered an agent, in private clothes, who had been sent to request me to present myself at the Prefecture before returning home.

I gave a verbal account of the incidents of the evening, and, before taking a slight rest, I drew up, there and then, the customary official report. At two o'clock that morning I reached home.

CHAPTER XIII.

DÉSIRÉ BODASSE'S FORMER FRIENDS.—THE CAFÉ DU FAUCON.

I WAS fast asleep. The maid-servant knocked at my bed-room door.

"What! already seven?"

"Oh no, sir, hardly six; but I have been up ever so long."

"What for?"

"For no end of reasons. I am sure you are going to scold me."

"Out with it, then."

"Well, sir, this morning at four o'clock I heard knocking at my door; such a noise. I thought the house was on fire. All at once somebody calls out, 'Annette, Annette!' I didn't know the voice. I jumped out of bed, asking: 'Who is there?' Somebody shouts through the keyhole: 'Quick! get up and call your master. I know he got back late; but that doesn't matter. I want to speak to him; very important—official.' Remembering what you told me, I asked for the person's name or a letter. 'I haven't got such a thing. My name is Pietri.' 'Good heavens,' I said to myself, 'that is the Prefect himself! The whole town must be on fire.' I dressed and opened the door. I then saw it was not the Prefect, nor even an agent. I happen to know them all, my husband being a constable."

"Who might it have been, then?"

"I can't say: the man is there. I told him to wait, as I didn't want to call you before six."

"Is he in one of my rooms?"

"Oh, no, in mine. You won't catch me letting anyone in of a night, especially if I don't happen to know him. As he objected to give me his name, I thought it must be a lunatic or some scamp."

"Are you quite sure he mentioned the Prefect's name?"

"Yes, quite sure, he said 'Pietri,' and that it was about last night's meeting."

"Go and fetch him, whilst I am dressing."

The girl disappeared, and a moment afterwards came back, followed by Voirbo. The sight of the wretch caused me the most unpleasant surprise. I took care, however, not to let him notice this, and it was with a smile I asked him to what I was indebted to the honour of his visit at such an unearthly hour.

"A thousand apologies," he replied, "for having presumed upon using the Prefect's name; but I was anxious to see you, and could hit upon no other plan at this early hour."

"Anything very important going on then?"

"Not exactly very important; but important enough, as you shall hear."

"When you left the Prefecture towards two this morning, I called in my turn. The head of the department, on receiving me, sharply blamed my behaviour at the meeting you had just reported to him. From that I concluded you had not shielded me."

"I was obliged to report what had happened and the remarks you made."

"Intentional ones to gain my point, as I am about to explain. The gentleman in question is going to have me prosecuted for having insulted the person of the Emperor, and for contemptuous statements on the subject of the government. He is going to request you to indite a declaration to this effect, which must be forwarded to the Public Prosecutor."

"I am sorry on your account, but you must agree that you have deserved it."

"I do agree, and that all the more willingly as I longed for some such prosecution, and it was, to a certain extent, with that purpose that I indulged last night in the flowery utterances to which you were an official witness."

"Do not deceive yourself in the matter; if they do prosecute, you will be convicted."

"That is just what I want! Considering how things are going, a few months' imprisonment for sedition are by no means to be despised, and if later on some terrible thing

comes about, as I rather anticipate it will, why then my political condemnation may—"

"Get you elected deputy, or at the very least municipal councillor," I added, to finish Voirbo's thought.

"You never know," he resumed, with his mock air of modesty. "At all events, any prosecution, especially now, will do me the service of accounting for my frequent presence at your office and that of the Public Prosecutor; nobody will guess that I am all the time trying to discover the murderer of my friend, Désiré."

"In so far, certainly, no harm can be done."

"Do you know, Mr. Commissary, that you checked that uproar very cleverly last night? Your firmness has been thought much of in high places."

I contented myself by shaking my head, without further replying to Voirbo's flattery.

The latter went on: "What do you think of that string of clowns at the meeting? Bright lot, are they not? Youcrasse, with his everlasting red nightcap, always produces an effect. He is a noodle thought much of at these meetings. Would go down wonderfully at the Palais Royal Theatre. And Léchard, that kitchen-jack—what a pretty fellow for the outside of a travelling show? And Podure and Chaleur—they are downright in earnest. It is their business to work the hall up to fever-heat—little by little, only, and they certainly succeed to a turn. As to the other speakers, they are of no account—only so many dummies."

I could have told Voirbo that he forgot to mention himself, and that I considered him as the greatest dummy of them all, but I kept this thought to myself. I had to handle him very gently if I wished to end my case successfully.

"Have you done anything in connexion with Bodasse's difficulty?" I asked, in order to bring him back to what I had most at heart.

"Of course I have. I have given up Sunday and Monday night to it, and I fancy I have not allowed the grass to grow under my feet."

"You have heard something interesting then?"

"I have a few particulars you may probably be able to turn to account, as soon as you have made sure of them."

"What may these particulars be?"

"Désiré, as you know, of course, was given to debauchery, but he had another weakness, and that was gambling. His luck was bad. You know the proverb, 'Unlucky at cards, lucky with the fair.' Play had become with him a violent passion, and, for all I know, may have been the cause of his death. In order to satisfy this hobby, he was in the habit of going to the Café du Faucon, a veritable hot-bed for thieves, prostitutes, and such-like people. There he would play and hobnob with all kinds of suspicious individuals. His society was all the more courted, as they knew him to be a man of independent means, and an old fogey's cash always stirs up greed. The frequenters of the place have very good reason for mistrusting strangers. Every new comer is looked upon by them as a police agent. On Saturday night I was there with scullion Léchard. Our appearance produced quite a sensation. As we were taking our seats at an empty table someone near me said to one of his friends: 'Look out!—two roadsters!' I ordered two cups of coffee and a small decanter of brandy. At a neighbouring table there were three persons, two of whom were former acquaintances of Bodasse; one, a fellow named Rifer, a tripe-dresser, living in the house with the well in the Rue Princesse; the other, called Cœur-Dur, an attendant in the operating-room of the School of Practical Anatomy. Rifer and Cœur-Dur are gamblers and drunkards. And, although one is quite as much a cheat as the other, they constantly reproach each other for their bad faith; quarrel, fight, and yet fraternise. Bodasse completed this trio. He was by no means the last to complain about his partners, but he had not the courage or strength of mind to break with them. I had purposely sidled up to the table occupied by Rifer and Cœur-Dur. The man I saw in their company was a stranger to me, but, judging by his appearance, he must have been some low bully. Whilst Rifer and Cœur-Dur were playing *écarté* this person scored by making a series of marks on the greasy table with the point of a pin. I shook hands with each of the players. This, I need not say, produced an excellent effect in the room. The attention and mistrust of which we had been the object on entering soon disappeared, and the conversation,

which had been suspended for a moment, went on. I know Rifer very much better than I do Cœur-Dur. I used to see him from time to time with Bodasse at the 'Rabbit's Squeak,' a cookshop in the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours. Being married, but separated from his wife, this young man is engaged at a tripe dealer's in the Marché Saint-Germain. His day's work over, he gambles, drinks, gets intoxicated, and, having become unconscious, you may lead him like a lamb.

"Last Sunday night it was Cœur-Dur who won. At eleven he went off with the bully. Rifer, very much disconcerted, remained behind, and paid the evening's reckoning. The occasion seemed to me an excellent one to sound and pump him. I had had some doubts about him, and this would just be an opportunity to clear them up.

"I therefore invited him to partake of some brandy. This was the man's weak side. Between our nips, I spoke to him about our mutual friend Désiré, whose tragic end he knew of. I told him that the suspicions of the authorities were in the direction of journeymen butchers and tripe-dressers. I was particular in laying stress on those two pursuits. For a moment Rifer remained silent, then, lighting his pipe, he brought out, in a jerky kind of of way, the following words, which I have carefully remembered:—

"'Since the case of Avinain, there has not been a body cut up, but people have wanted to mix butchers and tripe-dealers up with it—Even you, you are now talking about butchers—tripe-men—You say that because of me—You don't say anything about Cœur-Dur—why he cuts up carcasses every day, he does—He has got experience, and tools to do it with—Why, this very evening he was arranging with Entouca, who happened to be scoring, to rob me—I was holding the king and the ace—and yet, in spite of that, I am supposed to pay for the drink. Rather too much of a good thing!'

"After thus speaking, Rifer remained immovable, with drooping head and glaring eyes; really he looked an idiot I tapped him on the shoulder, saying: 'Some more coffee, old fellow?' 'Yes,' was his reply, like that of a man aroused from a dream. Whilst he was taking his coffee, I

turned the conversation once more on to Bodasse, upon which Rifer said: 'It's now two months since he disappeared. This is the place where I saw him last. That very night we had a game at *écarté*; at all events, he never robbed me, he was a proper chum. Coeur-Dur won that same game, though Désiré had my set that night—the king and the ace. Well, he lost five francs, five real francs; it was that wench, Gloria, who kept the score.' 'Gloria, who may she be?' I asked. 'Why, Entouca's mistress, that fellow who has just gone out with Coeur-Dur—a bully, that's what he is.'

"I poured out some more brandy for Rifer; he went on: 'Well, Désiré ought to have won then; but Gloria had manœuvred the score, and, all of a sudden, Entouca cries out: "You have lost, old fellow! pay up!" and pay he did and then he went out with them.' 'With whom do you say?' I inquired. 'With Gloria, of course; her man and Coeur-Dur.'

"Rifer said no more; he seemed a prey to gloomy thoughts. It was just upon midnight; the shutters were being put up. I emptied the remainder of the decanter into his cup. He swallowed the remainder, drunk as he was, like a machine, and then got up, reeling. I took his arm and led him out. The fresh air brought him to a bit, when he tapped me on the shoulder, saying: 'Listen, Voirbo. I know you are a friend, ain't you—a friend of mine and of Désiré? You don't happen to know that girl Gloria; such a spicy girl; quite the ticket; so clever, too; a regular fortune for that hound, Entouca; well, she spent several evenings with Désiré towards the end of the year—told me so himself. What's more, I saw them together one night in the Carrefour de Buci. It was very late. Gloria gave her arm to Bodasse; Entouca and Cœur-Dur, that card-sharper, were some distance behind. I saw them just as I see you, and I heard Entouca tell Cœur-Dur: "*We must get rid of the old man.*" Gloria and Entouca stopped away from the Café du Faucon for a fortnight, and when they did come back they treated every one of their pals; anyone could see they had plenty of money.' 'And did Cœur-Dur also stay away?' I asked. 'Don't know. He is awfully taken with Gloria.'

"Seeing that I could not get anything more out of Rifer,

whose speech was getting thicker and thicker, I took him home, with Léchard's help; and opening the door, by means of the secret I am acquainted with, pushed him into the passage.

"'Hang it all!' he exclaimed with a stutter. 'I see you know the little secret, you do. I have never shown it to you as I have to Cœur-Dur and Gloria, who promised to come and see me some night; but she never did.' 'Oh, I know the secret of the door!' I replied. 'You know, I suppose, that once upon a time I used to visit one of your neighbours?' 'Ah, yes!' said Rifer, 'that little party on the fifth floor—who sang at the Beuglant—nice dolly that; but when I went to embrace her on the stairs she always used to say, 'I smelt rather tripe—ish.'"

"'Good-night,' I said, pulling the door to, so as to put a stop to this drunken chatter, which had no more interest for me. That is what I learnt on Sunday night. My friend Léchard will tell you the same, word for word."

"Have you seen anything of Rifer since?"

"Yes, on Monday night, in the Café du Faucon. I wanted to take up the conversation of the previous evening; but he did not remember anything about it; he did not seem disposed to resume the topic. Delighted to have won three games of Cœur-Dur, he answered my questions with only a few words, and confined himself to pointing out Entouca and his mopsy, Gloria."

"All that you have told me, Monsieur Voirbo, is deserving of serious examination," said I. "I purpose seeing that girl Gloria and the man she is living with. I shall be able to get their address at the Prefecture. I shall send for Cœur-Dur, whose whereabouts must be known at the Ecole de Médecine. As for the young tripe-dresser, he can wait. Besides, it is impossible to fix the data for a criminal inquiry from the statements of a drunken man who, in his sober mood, would no doubt deny them."

"But I am prepared to maintain them."

"What! Would you go so far as to become a witness in the case?"

"And why not, pray? I would relate what I know, have seen, and heard; my statement would be interesting too, it would open people's eyes. Of course I should not

tell the examining magistrate or the jury that I am your agent, or that I went to the Café du Faucon in that capacity."

"At all events give me a few days for reflection; and come on Saturday morning next. Between now and then I shall have seen the chief secretary of the Prefecture in connection with last night's meeting."

This time Voirbo left me without offering me his hand; I was exceedingly thankful to him in consequence, for the more I studied the man the greater became my contempt for, and horror of him.

Had I not already formed my opinion about him, his conversation with that sot Rifer would have prejudiced me still more; but, bent upon discovering Bodasse's murderer, I manœuvred till my proofs should be complete.

In order to keep Voirbo on the wrong scent, by leading him to believe that I took all his statements quite seriously, and being anxious to know the individuals he was bringing to the fore, I determined to see them personally and ask for full explanations. On careful reflection, however, fearful of acting indiscreetly, which I might regret later on, I gave up my idea of inquiring at the Prefecture about Gloria's character as well as that of her friend; for I could easily find all I wanted to know by a visit to the Café du Faucon. Accordingly, in the course of the afternoon, at about four, I entered this establishment. The Café du Faucon, long since pulled down, was a typical one. It used to be kept by a Widow Touron, sixty years of age. I had had to do with her in connection with a purchase of stolen goods; but for want of sufficient evidence, she had the benefit of the doubt and had been acquitted. This woman was assisted in her business by a niece of the name of Ida, who was yet unmarried in spite of her forty-five summers. Not very intelligent, but remarkable for passive submission and obedience, she possessed one other valuable quality, she never spoke, though she was no mute. The mistress of the café knew how to appreciate this virtue, having her own excellent reasons for doing so. The name café was certainly a presuming one for such a place. It was rather a low, dirty pot-house, than a café. Loathsome filth was paramount in the one room which accommodated the guests. The furniture consisted of tables always greasy, bottomless chairs,

and an enormous cast-iron stove. Walls, ceiling, floor, cards, and dominoes—everything was greasy.

On the occasion of my visit semi-obscurity enveloped the place, which of an evening was lit up by petroleum-lamps, whose cracked chimney-glasses caused the flickering flame to be constantly moving and smoking. This smoke, combined with that of the pipes, cigarettes, and stove, emitted a nauseous odour. In this home of vice, the atmosphere was vitiated, and the light of an ashen-grey colour. As Voirbo had said, the habitual frequenters were a mixture of low prostitutes with their male hangers-on, and criminals who had undergone conviction; a veritable hotbed of rogues of every description. The room accommodated about fifty persons. In this forcing-house of thieves and murderers, in the midst of their brotherhood of crime, there might occasionally be seen peaceable, and by no means dangerous individuals, who, like Désiré Bodasse, experienced a certain pleasure in finding themselves in a society of disreputable people, ever ready to take advantage of the passions inherent in mankind. Coffee and brandy were the only articles of consumption. These had to be paid for on delivery, and to be drunk there and then. The attendant Ida would remove the glasses, without waiting for the departure of her customers.

As Voirbo had said, all strangers were suspected and taken for police agents. All conversation ceased upon the entry of anyone not known, the only sounds being the clicking of the dominoes. When these were loudly rattled on the tables, danger was suggested to those in the secret; at this there would be reciprocal watching, and suspicious glances would follow the movements of the new comer. Without speaking, without apparently knowing one another, the ordinary run of customers had adopted a language of signs, carefully studied and known only to them. The mode of looking up, an almost imperceptible wink of the eye, a gesture, a movement of the hand or foot, a swinging of the body to the right or left, all this had a meaning and expressed a thought. This mimicry was the masonic language of the place.

When I arrived at the Café du Faucon, Widow Touron introduced me into the only other room she possessed, and

in which she slept with her niece. This was an appropriate adjunct to the café. For sole furniture, I saw two filthy mattresses spread on the floor and devoid of sheets and blankets, but covered with foul linen and ragged clothes. The yellow, bare, damp walls were adorned in their corners with enormous cobwebs, which seemed to have been there ever since the place was built. The woodwork, painted a brownish colour, was smeared and stained with filth. The panes of the curtainless window appeared to have been cleaned with blacking. Above the mantelpiece was a looking-glass in a zinc frame. In front of it were a yellow earthen pan, half filled with dirty water, a piece of Marseilles soap, and two broken tooth-combs, full of hair of uncertain colour. Inside the chimney stood a tray filled with ashes for the benefit of a greyish kitten, which was lying on a rep petticoat thrown on one of the mattresses. The crowning piece of the room was a chamber utensil, chipped at the edge and broken at the handle, and which stood majestically forth on a wooden chest placed between the two beds. Widow Touron brought me a chair from the public room, and begged me to sit down. I preferred to stand. Curt in her replies, the landlady of the house assumed an air of compunction, and never mentioned the name of any of her customers without the polite prefix of "Monsieur," on which she laid intentional stress.

"*Monsieur* Désiré," said she, "has not been here for ever so long. He was one of my good customers. He used to play cards with *Monsieur* Rifer, and *Monsieur* Cœur-Dur. *Monsieur* Rifer lives in the Rue Princesse, and *Monsieur* Coeur-Dur in the Rue Dupuytren."

"You likewise have as regular frequenters a girl named Gloria and her friend Entouca. Do you know where they live?"

"*Madame* Gloria and *Monsieur* Entouca are also customers of mine. They are lodging at the 'Deux Cornes,' Rue de l'Ecole-de-Médecine."

"Your customers—that is to say those *ladies* and *gentlemen*—have, like your café, a bad reputation."

"I am aware of it, Mr. Commissary; but for all that my house is none the more dangerous than other liquor shops. My lease will soon be up. In another six months

the Café du Faucon will be pulled down, and I shall return to Antwerp, my native place. Will the police be any the happier after my café is got rid of? My customers, whom you could always have at your beck and call, will get dispersed, and it will become difficult for you to lay your hand on any one you may require. If you did not always manage to find here the person you wanted, you could at least obtain some sort of information about them."

Considering that Widow Touron was a native of Belgium, she was to be credited with a thorough knowledge of vicious Paris.

I took my leave of her, and the following day, at eight in the morning, Ringué and Champy brought Cœur-Dur, Entouca, and the girl Gloria into my presence. These poor wretches had now the appearance of great criminals, as suggested by Voirbo. I first examined the two men. Their statement with reference to Désiré Bodasse added nothing new to the inquiry. I gave orders that the tripe-dresser, Rifer, should be sent for, after which I examined the girl Gloria. She related to me, in all apparent sincerity, the way in which she had made the acquaintance of Bodasse.

"Your lover," I said, "used to visit Désiré occasionally, I believe?"

"Never! Entouca and I are, I am sorry to say, of not much account. One thing, however, we can boast of, and that is never to have killed or robbed anyone. That's something barring the rest."

"Have either of you any parents or relations?"

"Not as we are aware of. We were abandoned children, and were picked up and reared by the authorities."

"What is your name?"

"I was christened Savina, but I am only known as Gloria. It seems that one winter's evening I was found stowed away under a seat in a miserable little café in the Place Maubert. I was wrapped up in an old petticoat. One of the customers, by accident, put his foot on the parcel. I cried out just at the moment he was calling to one of the waiters for a 'Gloria' (coffee and brandy). At this everybody said 'Gloria,' and I have kept the name ever since. Savina is the name of a Saint, whose day in the Church

calendar is the 30th of January, which was the day I was picked up from under the seat."

"And Entouca, has he the same origin and baptism as you have?"

"It's different with him. He was picked up on the 25th of February, 1848, on the paving-stones of the barricade in the Rue Saint-Jacques, which the insurgents had just abandoned, and where his parents were supposed to have been killed. He got the name of Entouca. When he was a young 'un he preferred an *en-tout-cas* (sunshade) to all other toys. At all events, so he says. Chance brought us together, and we got to like one another, because of our common origin, the streets. Entouca is by no means a bad man. We have been living together now three years, and you would hardly believe it, he hasn't beaten me once yet. On the contrary, he has stood up for me more than once. He is rather lazy, but I manage to make enough for both. He is kind, gentle, amiable, and honest in a general way; and that's about all the likes of me can expect from her man."

The girl expressed herself quite naturally, without any showing off, or mock-shame, but with a species of effrontery of which she herself seemed scarcely conscious.

"And what may Cœur-Dur be doing?" I asked her.

"He works and gets his living. He also likes me, but he gambles and gets drunk, two faults I can't put up with. But he is by no means a bad fellow, and is always ready to do anyone a good turn. I owe him a good deal, because when I was ill I got admitted into the Hospital de la Charité, where, owing to his recommendation, I was looked after and cared for like any honest woman. I am not ungrateful, I assure you, and I think more of the kindnesses than of the harm people may do me. I have got a feeling heart."

"Used Bodasse often to gamble with Cœur-Dur and Rifer?"

"Very often. I used to do the scoring. I used to favour Cœur-Dur a bit, when any of his cards were thrown out. That's the only thing I have to blame myself for in regard to poor old Désiré."

Having placed no particular confidence in Voirbo's

insinuations with reference to Cœur-Dur, Rifer, and Entouca, after having heard the girl Gloria's explanations, I felt firmly convinced that in this matter, as in all others, the political informer was doing his best to mislead me. In spite, however, of this conviction, it was my duty to make one more attempt in regard to the frequenters of the Café du Faucon by confronting all four of them. Rifer had just made his appearance, I was told, so that I dismissed Gloria and ordered him to be shown in.

He informed me that he had been married five years, and that being childless, and not on the best of footings with his wife, they had separated by mutual consent. The latter was cook to a deputy, whereas he was engaged at a tripe-dealer's in the Marché Saint-Germain; he used to breakfast at the shop, but dined in the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours, at the "Rabbit's Squeak," a house where he had made the acquaintance of the tailor Pierre and of Father Désiré.

"For a whole month," Rifer went on, "I had seen nothing more either of Désiré, or of Pierre. Last Sunday the tailor came most unexpectedly to the Café du Faucon, and also on the following day; he drank and talked with me, promising to turn up again this very night."

"Did he say anything about Bodasse?"

"Yes, he told me he had been murdered; but I knew as much from the papers."

I now sent for Cœur-Dur, Entouca, and Gloria again, and, addressing the four, said: "People in your walk of life have an idea that the police are ignorant, and know nothing of what they ought to know; that they are vexatious and useless. I am going to prove to you that they never despair, when on the track of a crime affecting public security. Now this is what each of you four did on the evening of the 15th of December last."

The three men looked at one another. As for the girl, she was vainly trying to cudgel her brains as to the way she had spent her time on the evening in question.

I went on: "On that evening all four of you were in the Carrefour de Buci; but there was another person with you; a man who has not been seen since then; a man who has been murdered—Désiré Bodasse."

The features of my auditors expressed astonishment, but no fear.

I proceeded: "Whilst you, Gloria, were taking the lead, and giving your arm to old Bodasse; you, Entouca, said to Cœur-Dur: '*We must get rid of the old man.*'"

"True enough; I remember distinctly!" exclaimed Gloria, who, all the time I was speaking, had not ceased to question her memory.

"Yes, to be sure, I certainly did say that," added Entouca. "Don't you remember, Cœur-Dur?" The latter replied by an affirmative nod.

I was carefully watching Rifer all this time; he was silent, and seemed to understand nothing. If he had made the observation with which Voirbo had credited him, he had evidently forgotten all about it. This remark having been confirmed by Entouca, it was evident that someone must have repeated it to Voirbo, and Rifer, under the influence of intoxication, could have been the only man.

Entouca continued: "I am going to explain to you how and why I said 'We must get rid of the old man.' Father Désiré wanted to take Gloria much too often to his lodgings. As he was by no means a generous man, and as my lady expected someone else that very night—you know, of course, a young woman always does expect somebody, without precisely knowing whom—I made the observation in question. All I intended was that we should tire him out, make him walk a lot, so that he should drop us."

"When did this happen?"

"I am not quite positive."

"It could not have been on the 15th of December," replied Gloria, "for on that day I was at my country-house (prison of Saint-Lazare), where I remained a fortnight. I was let out on Christmas Day. You can have that proved, Mr. Commissary."

"Why, of course, at that time I was also locked up," went on Entouca, "for I was arrested soon after you, and got seven days at the Depôt for assault, and, what's more, it wasn't me at all that assaulted."

"Had you been assaulted yourself?"

"No; you don't catch me getting assaulted. That would

never do for Gloria; why, she would think nothing of me afterwards."

"Explain yourself."

"Well, this is how it was. I was with Fluxion-de-Poitrine. You know him, don't you, Cœur-Dur?"

"No, I don't," said the latter.

"But you do, you know very well whom I mean."

"Tapis-Vert, eh?" added Gloria.

"The very man; Fluxion-de-Poïtrine, Tapis-Vert, one and the same. It is me, Mr. Commissary, who has given those two names to a coachman, a friend of mine, because he has got an old open trap he works summer and winter. When the weather is fine, all is right; but when it freezes, rains, or blows, then it's no joke, I can tell you, to be in his trap. And yet having got only that one concern, my friend must stick to his victoria, and enjoys himself all the while he sees a customer catching cold. I rather fancy that doctors and chemists tip him for everyone he manages to lay up."

"All this is very interesting, but it does not inform me—"

"In truth, you keep on chattering like a magpie, but you don't say why you were locked up," remarked Gloria.

"Have you finished with your *solo?*" rejoined Entouca, with a vexed air.

"No, I haven't, and I object to you talking slang," observed the young woman. "This *gentleman* spends his time hunting for new words; people would almost fancy you want to help the Academicians to finish their dictionary."

"Whether I work for the Academy or not is my business; you know just as much about that as I do. There happen to be persons inclined to buy a couple of unpublished expressions of me—"

"That's all right, but you have not told the Commissary yet why you were locked up."

"I am coming to it. It was one Sunday night, as we were leaving 'Bullier's.' Fluxion-de-Poitrine, or Tapis-Vert, whichever you like, had his mistress with him, a young and pretty Arlesian."

"I object to your finding any other woman pretty, except your own," interrupted Gloria.

"You know well enough, darling, I wouldn't change you for the best; what I am saying is only by way of talk. I

continue therefore: Tapis-Vert is as jealous as a seal. Well, he gets it into his head to squabble with his princess, because she jabbered some Marseilles slang with a fellow countryman of hers from Carpentras, a young gent at college, of course. The young woman gave Tapis-Vert as good as he gave, and really she has got a tongue, she doesn't come from the south for nothing. Well, she goes and calls him a funk; whereupon he gives her one in the face, and such a one that she flops down some way in front of him on the other side, and her two legs sticking right up in the air. There's a regular crowd—some laugh, others cry out, 'Here's another guy,' and the police come rushing up. All I wanted was to save Fluxion-de-Poitrine, but bless me they go and take us both up. Sum total: a week in limbo for each of us. I remember I was let out on the 20th of December, because, on that very day, Cœur-Dur and I had taken some chocolate to Gloria at Saint-Lazare. Right or wrong, Cœur-Dur?"

"Quite right," replied the latter.

"All that can be easily proved, but there is something else. At the beginning of the new year you disappeared for some time from the Café du Faucon, which you used to frequent regularly."

"As for me," answered Gloria, "I went to show off for a fortnight on the stage of a travelling showman."

"And I," added Entouca, "I went and sold a taking little article on the boulevards. It was a Capuchin monk, with his cowl, cut out of horn. You could move the feet to and fro, one held a tooth-pick and the other a nail-parer. Didn't I sell a lot! People were almost fighting for them. They cost me four sous, and I sold them for fifty centimes, sometimes for a franc, according to the people I had to deal with. I had a splendid harvest. In order to be all the nearer to our business we took a lodging for the fortnight's holiday in the Rue Lepic, at Mother Bichette's a very decent sort of landlady."

"All this will be inquired into, and I shall be sure to find out whether you are deceiving me."

"Listen to me, sir," resumed Entouca, in a contrite tone of voice. "I am what is commonly called a bully, not much of a profession, you will own. Well, believe me, when I tell

you people of my class have only a choice of what crime to commit, so you may, if you like, suspect both Gloria and myself. But, up to the present, I can swear that neither she nor me have been guilty of any whatsoever, no, not even a simple theft; no, not even the tiniest bit of a swindle. Ask whom you like, and people will tell you: 'Entouca and Gloria may be loose, brawling, and free and easy; but as honest as the day.' It isn't all our own fault we are living like this. I wanted to marry Gloria, then I should have worked, but she wouldn't hear of such a thing. She is gay to the core. She told me: 'We are orphans, we have got no name, no family to respect; let us live free.' There's my friend Cœur-Dur, he likes Gloria too. I suffer a goodish bit in consequence—ay, sometimes I have got jealousy gnawing at my vitals, but I don't hate him for all that. I respect him, for he has at least got pluck to work, and to live without sponging on a woman. As for pal Rifer, who you see before you, he is a proper fellow, but no end of a soaker, worse luck. He has got it in his system. He works hard enough of a day, but of a night he'll go and get regularly stupefied with drink at the Café du Faucon. And yet, sober or drunk, he is always mild enough, a child could lead him, like a poodle by a string. Men given to drink get to see everything red in time, so some fine day they kill somebody without any sort of reason. I often say, 'Old friend Rifer, you must give up wine, it may play you some nasty tr ick yet.'"

"It isn't wine I care for in the least," said Rifer, "I can't touch it because of the colour; but brandy, that's quite another pair of shoes; I love it and can't go without it, and yet I feel it will be my death-drink."

"Rifer and Cœur-Dur, you may go. As for you Entouca and Gloria, stay awhile."

"But, sir, we have done no harm."

"I believe you have not. You will stay here till I have found out whether you were really both imprisoned at the time you mentioned. I will give orders that the inquiry be made as soon as possible."

An hour later my secretary came back from the Prefecture and informed me that Gloria had been at Saint Lazare from the 14th to the 24th of December; and as for

Entouca he had also spent from the 15th to the 21st of the same month in safe keeping. This proof being conclusive, neither the one nor the other could possibly be implicated in the murder of Désiré Bodasse, and I therefore dismissed them.

"Many thanks for your kindness," Entouca said to me. "Instead of having our statement tested at once you might have put the matter off till to-morrow, and have sent us to the lock-up in the meanwhile, by the first state-coach that passed. Gloria and I won't forget that. If by chance we should learn anything which may be of interest to you, send word for me to come and let you know."

"Come when you please, and if you should bring any interesting information I shall be under an obligation to you."

"Who knows?" replied Entouca, moved, "a wretched individual like myself might perhaps be able to make himself useful in some way or other yet. Excuse my boldness, Mr. Commissary, and be lenient because of my little Gloria, so nice, and whom I am so fond of, especially when she smokes her cigarette like a corporal. Ah, yes! she would soon make a decent man of me if only she would become a virtuous woman."

CHAPTER XIV.

DELIRIUM TREMENS.—VOIRBO'S ARREST.

It was Voirbo's duty to put in an appearance at my office on Saturday the 20th of February, at eight in the morning; but instead of doing so he sent me the following letter:—

"Paris, February 20th, 1869.

"Mr. Commissary,—Having to finish, for a wedding which takes place this very day, a complete suit of clothes on which I have been engaged all night long, you will not see me at the time agreed upon. I have, besides, nothing further to acquaint you with in connexion with *our case.*

"You will receive no further instructions from the Prefecture. They dare not prosecute me in connexion with my speech on the question of the Increase of Wages.

"I know, from a positive source, that you are appointed to be present next Sunday at the new meeting about to take place at Belleville, where the discussion abruptly broken off is to be concluded. Most likely you will not see me there.

"I am most anxious to complete my investigations in connexion with the murder of my friend Désiré. I shall devote all my evenings to pumping the frequenters of the Café du Faucon. I am in hopes that next week will not go by without our being definitely informed as to the circumstances of Bodasse's death, and also of the name of his murderer.

"Your devoted servant,

"Voirbo.

"26, Rue Lamartine."

This letter was another stratagem; but what could be its purpose? Could Voirbo be thinking of taking flight? Or did he simply wish to avoid calling at my place, fearful of being recognised by Ringué and Champy? Formerly, when calling upon me on February the 13th, he had placed my summons in a sealed envelope. This was his means of

announcement, so as not to give his name to the officials Likewise, on the 17th, he found his way to me, by making use of the name of the Prefect of Police. To-day, he makes his apologies in writing. Assuredly, this Voirbo is a sly rascal. With an astuteness equal to his own, one must be on the lookout for every surprise, not lose sight of him on any account, follow up all his combinations.

I should certainly like to make sure whether he really intends spending his evenings next week at the Café du Faucon. But how accomplish this? Widow Touron won't assist me. Neither my men nor I can enter the den without being recognised—not having been furnished with detectives when I asked for them of the head of the city police. I am by no means desirous to subject myself to a new refusal, or another intervention of those political agents who stood so badly by me. The best thing to be done is to fall back upon the good will of Entouca and Gloria.

I therefore sent word by Champy that I should like to see them on Monday next at ten in the evening. Not having to be on duty on the Sunday preceding, I had determined to spend that day with two of my friends, the sculptor Clésinger and Charles Coligny, private secretary to M. Arsène Houssaye, the editor of *L'Artiste*. Both these gentlemen were in the habit of tormenting me to show them some of the city slums.

The day being over I told them, on taking my leave, that if they would put in an appearance at my office in the course of the following evening, I should have an opportunity of getting them shown a Paris drinking den. They eagerly accepted my offer.

On Monday night, then, Clésinger, Charles Coligny, Entouca and Gloria were all together in my private office. I told the two latter that, in order to show my confidence in them, I had sent for them to ask if they would pilot a couple of friends of mine, anxious to spend an hour or two at the Café du Faucon.

"Then they must be painters or bookwriters," cried Gloria.

"Just so. They are anxious to make a study in morals there. You can show them different specimens; there are plenty at Widow Touron's. You had better tell such of your friends as are disposed to be inquisitive, that these

gentlemen are two strangers, anxious to see anything curious. Of course you'll be careful not to let out who it is that has entrusted you with such a mission."

"We can have no kind of interest in doing that," answered Entouca. "If we mentioned you, they would immediately call us informers."

"Act as you think best; if necessary take a hand at cards with Rifer and Cœur-Dur, and you might at the same time let me know whether Voirbo, the tailor, still frequents the Faucon."

"He did yesterday," replied Gloria. "For some days he has been there constantly, and keeps on paying for Rifer's drink. Yesterday he had fuddled him to such an extent, that he was obliged to give him his arm as he was taking him home. On seeing them go out together in this way, I said to Entouca: 'Whatever you do don't drink with that blackguard. See the state he gets Rifer in night after night. Perhaps Monsieur Macé has told him to make Rifer fuddled so as to get him to speak.'"

"You are mistaken, Mademoiselle Gloria."

"You must own I am open. I only repeat just what I said."

"I gave Monsieur Voirbo no kind of instructions. Being a former friend of Désiré, he is hunting up, quite on his own responsibility, the individuals who may have murdered him, and whom he reckons to find amongst the frequenters of the Café du Faucon."

"Well, am I to out with it? Entouca and I have but little confidence in that tailor, who is never doing any work. His life is a singular one. Like us, he would have some difficulty to introduce his family to you. Ours—well it's the world, isn't it, my little Entouca? His, well—it's no one."

"But, as he has succeeded in getting married, he must have produced certificates of some kind?"

"Perhaps they were not his own."

"What makes you think so? You must have some sort of reason for what you say."

"This, then, is my reason. Last 15th of August, on the occasion of the fêtes, I happened to be in the Café Belge. At a table next to me there sat two Englishmen, who

seemed to be waiting for somebody. This somebody turned up at six, and was no other than Voirbo."

"There can be no harm in knowing a couple of Englishmen, and in keeping an appointment with them."

"Right enough, but these Englishmen instead of calling him Voirbo, addressed him by the name of 'Peter Ball' whilst shaking hands with him. They all moved off together."

"Peter is English for Pierre, and Ball is, I think, the name of the lady with whom Voirbo contracted his first marriage in England. There is nothing suspicious so far. Nevertheless, I don't want to disguise from you that I am interested in what this Monsieur Voirbo says and does. You would, therefore, confer a favour upon me in keeping me informed as to his doings."

"As for that you may depend upon me," said Entouca. "I have got this stump-speaker up to my very throat."

Clésinger and Coligny now withdrew with Entouca and Gloria; and, when I saw them again on the following day, they expressed their complete satisfaction at the intelligent manner in which their *ciceroni* had discharged their mission.

As Voirbo, in his letter, had given me to understand, I received my orders to be present at the meeting which was to take place that evening at the "Folies-Belleville." I proceeded thither at the usual time. There were but few persons in the hall, and, especially, no women. The meeting was a wearisome one, without any kind of interest. Voirbo did not make his appearance.

The next day I was informed by Entouca that the former had spent his evening at the Café du Faucon, when he showed himself most anxious to pay for the inordinate quantity of alcohol consumed by Rifer, who now swore by no one else in the world. What on earth may he be driving at? What does he intend doing with this man whom he is now constantly keeping under the influence of liquor? I was not long in discovering this.

On Thursday, the 26th of February, on returning home at one in the morning, Rifer suddenly began to smash all his goods and chattels. He effected this by means of a hatchet. As he went on with his work of destruction, he threw piece after piece out of the window looking on the

Rue Princesse, which fortunately was deserted at this time of night. Two policemen, on night duty, seeing odds and ends of furniture tumbling about their ears, entered the house. Rifer having accidentally left his door open, they were thus enabled to throw themselves upon him, before he was in a position to assume the defensive, hatchet in hand. After a desperate struggle, they succeeded in overpowering him, and in removing him to the station-house, in the Place Saint-Sulpice.

The unfortunate man was raving mad, and continued shouting out:

"It is I! I, who have cut Désiré to pieces! Look in the well and you will find the legs; go to the canal, go to the Seine, and you'll find pieces of his flesh. Quick! make haste, I want a boat so as to fish them up! The head—you'll find it under the bed, my bed—it hides away in the day time; but at night it comes out, out on my pillow—by side of me. Take it—take it away! pitch it out of window!"

The inspector of the police station immediately sent one of his men after me. This man, puffing and blowing, and quite beside himself, informed me that "the murderer of the Rue Princesse, a tripe-dresser, living in the very house of the two legs, the head belonging to which was under his bed (*sic*), had just been arrested."

"That must be Rifer, then."

"No, sir, he's a drunkard."

"Very well, I will follow you."

A few moments afterwards I reached the Place Saint-Sulpice. On entering the guard-house, I saw Rifer crouching in the corner. He seemed quite calm. The police did not lose sight of him, however, and followed his slightest movements. On seeing me approach, the unhappy man leapt up with a bound and looked fixedly at me. Tears were trickling down his face. As I attempted to take his hand, he seized upon mine, and, after having raised it to his lips, burst forth:

"Pray, sir, do pray stop those men from doing me any harm. It's true I have killed the *little old man*, the tailor has told me so. I am going to give myself up. I will no longer be followed about. Voirbo says you are looking for the old man's head. I have it at home, under the bed. I'll give it you."

"Well and good, my friend; only keep quiet, recover yourself and go on weeping; it will relieve you."

"But about the head? you must go and fetch it."

"Yes, yes, quite so; we shall be going together presently, and I'll take it away from you. Where did you spend your evening—tell me?"

"At the Faucon."

"And with whom?"

"With the tailor."

"And was it he who made you drink?"

"Yes—brandy—it's a drink I am very fond of. Only when I see the tailor I get frightened of the police."

Rifer's eyes became blood-shot when uttering the word "police." He then turned on the agents and yelled out, shaking his fist at them: "Yes, I am afraid of the police. Parcel of curs. You look upon me as a wild beast. It's my wife who pays you to spy about me. Voirbo himself said to me, 'Don't be caught, whatever you do; much better drown yourself.' That's what I meant to do, taking the old man's head away with me; but those two fellows came and fetched me from my own place, to give me up to the executioner. No, I'll not mount the scaffold; let me go and drown myself. I want to drown myself, as the tailor told me to."

The man's excitement kept on increasing. The police tried hard to seize him, and eventually secured him; when, freeing himself with a superhuman effort, he yelled forth once more:

"Don't touch me! I am on fire! Can't you see that he is cutting me in little pieces? That is the way Désiré is taking his revenge. Do, do give him back his head!"

Once more the men attempted to seize Rifer; but seeing that the struggle was only infuriating him all the more, they desisted at a sign I made to them. He went on:

"Open the prison door; go and fetch your judges. I want to go to the Assizes, to La Roquette, and then—out with the guillotine. My head shall be chopped off like Désiré's. I suppose my wife will be satisfied then. The old man was her lover. Of course I was bound to kill him. Yes, yes; I tell you he was her lover. Voirbo caught

them together at the baths. Besides, I wanted money for drink. I knew from what the tailor told me that the old fellow was rich. Poor old Désiré! Why he could hardly stand on his own legs—kept on always talking about Gloria's. She has certainly got good legs. My friend Pierre even told me he had seen them. But we have drunk no end of brandy this week."

Saying this, Rifer smacked his lips, then continued:

"Ah, what good stuff brandy is! give me another nip. I am as thirsty as a fish. Just a tiny nip, about the size of Désiré's legs in the corner yonder. Look! don't you see how they are trembling?—of course they are cold. Look! now they are trying to get warm; don't they rear and bob round the stove!"

Rifer tried to run. He moved as best he could round the cast-iron stove, shouting:

"Just let me catch those legs to pitch them into the well. Shut the stove-door, will you? they are trying to get inside it. Watch! now they are playing hide-and-seek under the camp-bed. Now they're off! Bang! Here comes the head. See how it rolls along! And look at those staring eyes, they're wide open. How they stare at me! No, they're looking for the old man's wig. It's not here. I chucked it into the water. I'll go and fetch it. Right! Now his bald pate is stopping. Ah! there are the legs coming back again. Do you see? they're dancing round and about the head. The head is also dancing, the whole place is dancing. Let's get into the air. I want room, room. I want to dance myself."

And Rifer began capering about, making the most hideous grimaces. The policemen seemed petrified at this spectacle. After a short, giddy dance Rifer stopped exhausted, and, looking down at his feet, said:

"You see I am in a pool of clotted blood, up to my knees. Look, the head is sinking to the bottom, and the legs as well."

Rifer continued to rave with extraordinary volubility. His state of dementia was complete, and at moments rose to paroxysms of fury. All he could remember was his last conversations with Voirbo. Saturated with alcohol, he was a prey to hallucinations which evoked to his mind,

everywhere and in every shape, the scattered limbs of old Désiré, whose murderer he verily believed himself to be. Alcohol was now rapidly completing its ravages, physically as well as morally. The unhappy man was violently shaken by nervous crises, which, at intervals, produced semi-epileptic convulsions. Then came piercing shrieks, roars like those of a wild beast, and ungovernable leaps and starts.

Still believing himself to be in pursuit of the head and legs of Bodasse, which he saw everywhere, he darted furiously, now in one direction, now in the other. Suddenly he commenced to bark like a dog, and, crawling on all fours, began to leap and run about the floor with extraordinary rapidity. He was terrible to behold—his face was congested, his scared eyes were starting from their sockets, his neck was stretched out of all proportion, and his frothy tongue was lolling out of his mouth like that of a dog dying of thirst. The man was prey to a veritable attack of *delirium tremens*, the terrible symptom of the approaching end of a dipsomaniac.

In order to put an end to this terrible scene, it was found necessary to place a strait waistcoat on him, and it was only with considerable difficulty that four strong policemen succeeded in overpowering him and placing him in a vehicle which I had sent for. I had him conveyed at once to the Asylum of Saint Anne, with the necessary order for his admittance.

The man's wife, to whom I had sent, now made her appearance. She related to me that at the very commencement of their married life her husband had given way to drink; that she had tried every possible means to cure him of his deplorable propensity, and having failed, she had finally made up her mind to take a servant's place. "Luckily," she went on to say, "we have no family. Since our separation I have only seen him once or twice. My husband is a weak-minded man, but by no means vicious, his disposition is mild rather than violent; but what you are telling me now about him in nowise astonishes me. Already before our separation, it would sometimes happen that, when a prey to any nervous crisis brought about by drink, he would confess himself to be the author of crimes

he had only heard of through the newspapers. I have more than once told him he would go out of his mind, if he persisted in his drinking habits."

In spite of the early hour, I went with Madame Rifer to her husband's lodging in the Rue Princesse. It was impossible for anyone to form an idea of the disorder and confusion existing in the room. Clothes, linen, furniture, crockery, everything was lying torn or broken in pieces about the floor. In the midst of all this wreck, I searched for some kind of evidence, but could find nothing worthy of attention.

"Is there anything more for me to do?" Madame Rifer asked me.

"Nothing further here, madame, but I intend giving you an order, which will enable you to pay your husband a visit in the course of the day."

"I thank you very much, although such a visit will be for me a severe trial."

"And when you come back I should be obliged if you would drop in at my office and tell me how he is going on."

That afternoon at about four, Madame Rifer came and informed me that she was a widow.

"God," she said, "has been merciful to him. Death is indeed a blessing for him."

I apprised the young widow of the formalities necessary to be gone through, and gave her at the same time the key of her husband's lodging.

In the outer office I noticed Gloria in conversation with Champy. She knew of the incidents of the preceding night.

"Voirbo is indeed a wretch!" she exclaimed on entering my private office, "it is he who was the cause of Rifer's destruction. Last night, at the Café du Faucon, he made him drink no end of spirits, and then, to do for him altogether, he took him at midnight to a brothel in the Rue des Quatrevents, where he got him to swallow a whole bottle of champagne. That was the finishing stroke. That did for him. I told Entouca to keep his eye on the tailor. Like enough he'll be netting him."

"Whatever you do don't follow Voirbo about; that would be the very way to make him smell a rat. Let me know to-night, at the Odéon Theatre, when the performance is

over, whether the tailor puts in an appearance at Widow Touron's, and how he seems."

Gloria now went off to join her lover, and at half-past eleven, Entouca, passing by me under the theatre arcade, in front of Marpon's bookshop, slipped into my hands a note to the following effect:

"Eleven o'clock. V— playing cards with C—. R—'s name not mentioned."

So much the better, thought I; then I shall be able to get a good night's rest. Voirbo is having a hand at cards with Cœur-Dur—so he won't want to leave his game. To-morrow is the 27th February; just a month since the examining magistrate handed me his portrait. I told him at the time that I'd let him have it back without delay. I think I shall be able to keep my word. To-morrow, then, for a visit to M. Voirbo. The event foreseen and plotted by him for his own personal security, will precipitate his doom.

The following day, however, instead of my calling upon Voirbo, the contrary took place; it was he who called upon me.

As previously mentioned, my private office opened by means of a glass door on to a small garden, giving admittance to the Rue Bonaparte, an entrance only available to residents at No. 53 in the Rue d'Assas, where my official premises were situated. On Saturday, the 27th, on reaching my office at eight o'clock in the morning, I observed Voirbo in my garden. One thing is certain, I thought, he does not care about entering by the main entrance. I unbolted the glass door and admitted him into the room; then I mechanically pushed the door to again, leaving it closed by the latch only.

"As I was passing," Voirbo remarked, "I saw the gate in the Rue Bonaparte standing open. I took advantage of this to enter and wait for you in the garden. Your messenger does not open the office till nine, and I was anxious to see you before the arrival of the public and of Widow Rifer, who, I believe, has an appointment with you here this morning."

"You have done quite right, Monsieur Voirbo. Pray be seated, and allow me to glance through my correspondence. I am expecting an important dispatch. Here it is—I see it requires an immediate reply; just one moment to scribble

it off and I shall be at your disposal. Here are the morning papers. You will find in *Le Droit* that sentences of three and six months' imprisonment have been passed on citizens Budaille and Bachelerie, speakers at public meetings, who were prosecuted for holding up the government to contempt, and for creating ill-feeling between citizens. You are probably as well acquainted with these gentlemen as you are with the Prefecture of Police?"

"I know Budaille well," replied Voirbo, opening *Le Droit*; but Bachelerie only slightly. They are neither of them dangerous."

I had no telegram to answer; but being surprised by Voirbo's visit, I was anxious to gain time, as my staff did not arrive till nine. I therefore wrote the following note for my secretary, on a sheet of official paper:

"Saturday, 8 a.m.

"MONSIEUR LEROY,—Voirbo has just arrived in my room by way of the garden; he is here before me. As I have him, I mean to keep him. He is a man of resolution, capable of anything. It behoves us, therefore, to take our precautions, so that he may neither escape, nor offer any resistance. As soon as you arrive, shut the iron gate opening on the Rue Bonaparte, and fasten up my garden gate by means of a strong piece of wire. Give the remainder of the staff, which will arrive about the same time as yourself, the following instructions: When I first ring the bell the messenger is to enter my room and see to the fire. On going out he is to take with him the shovel, tongs, and poker. You will then come in yourself to get me to sign something or other. Whilst I am reading your document, you will take your place in front of the glass door, so that you may be able at the requisite moment to draw the bolt and turn the key in the lock. When I ring a second time, Ringué and Champy are to enter my room. Ringué is to remain close to the door communicating between your room and mine. Champy is to stand behind my chair and to closely watch Voirbo's movements. Let each one understand precisely what he has to do, so that there may be no misunderstanding, and wait for my first ring."

I placed this note in an envelope, and, whilst Voirbo

seemed taken up with reading the papers, I laid it—fully exposed, and kept in its place by a paper-weight—on my secretary's blotting-pad. This done, I resumed my seat. By these means I had gained close upon half-an-hour; I had still to gain another thirty minutes. This seemed to me easy enough by encouraging Voirbo to give me a long account of his proceedings in tracing his friend's murderers; for that was, of course, the object of his visit.

"And now I am at your disposal, Monsieur Voirbo."

The political spy slowly folded up the paper he was reading and commenced: "I know all about Rifer's death. Both for me as for yourself, this occurrence is greatly to be regretted, and you will soon share my opinion. This tripe-dresser was undoubtedly the murderer, or at all events one of the murderers of my poor friend. Rifer was by no means a bad fellow; but he was wanting in mental perception, and unconsciousness is a dangerous thing. He ought, therefore, not to be regarded in the light of a professional criminal, but rather as a maniac, whose deed was the outcome of delirium, brought about by persecution. For the life of me I cannot understand how he could have persuaded himself that Bodasse was his wife's lover, and his greatest enemy. Perhaps, knowing his weak character, someone had instilled this idea into him by giving him to understand that he would have no peace of mind till Bodasse was out of the way. It must have been in strong doses that someone or other infused what are termed *illusions* into his restless mind. On the other hand, this man, whose intelligence had become stunted and paralysed by the abuse of alcoholic stimulants, may have been induced, through want of money, to become a participator in the ambuscade in which poor Désiré lost his life.

"But there will be no difficulty in getting hold of his accomplices. To-morrow I purpose bringing you a young woman, a former friend of Gloria's, who will enlighten you on Rifer's account, and on that of his associates, Coeur-Dur and Entouca. She used to know Bodasse very well indeed, and proof in hand, she will be able to tell you what has become of my old friend's bonds. You shall see for yourself, Mr. Commissary. The people I am referring to are, without a doubt, the guilty parties. That drunken fool, Rifer, at

all events settles one of your difficulties; for, by his public avowals, and by his death, he redeems your responsibility, and satisfies your pride."

Voirbo was wandering, but I took good care not to call his attention to it; I therefore allowed him to go on, insinuating that everybody should be incriminated in the case—except himself. He continued:

"Yes, Rifer accused himself, in the presence of the door-keeper and the lodgers of the house where he lived; he even confessed to you. And, mark the singular coincidence, he inhabited the very house where the well happens to be in which you found the legs. It was there he must have committed the crime. The principal culprit has been discovered, and is dead; that is as much as the examining magistrate could expect, and he ought to be satisfied."

I remained cool. Voirbo noticed it, and manifested his surprise.

"Have you nothing to reply?"

"I am listening to you."

"You seem depressed, are you unwell?"

"I have never felt better in my life."

"Then," he went on, endeavouring to smile, "you must be mourning for Rifer."

"Perhaps so."

"And why, pray?"

"Because that wretched man has been the victim of his own passions. But never mind that now. Can you give me the address of the young woman you purpose bringing here to-morrow? I would send for her, and have her antecedents looked up at the same time."

"Easy enough. I must have her address somewhere about me."

Voirbo unbuttoned his coat. As he was taking his pocket-book from an inner pocket, a card fell out of it and, turning over and over, fell on the floor. Quickly stooping down, I picked it up and handed it to him, not before I had had time enough, however, to notice a steamboat surmounting the address of some shipping agents. Such a card, in this man's pocket, was significant; he was evidently preparing to be off.

"Strange," said Voirbo, whilst fumbling in his pocket-

book, "I can't find that young woman's address; I must have left it at home, I will post it to you in the course of the day."

I now pulled the bell-rope and told the messenger to put some coke on the fire. The lad took the scuttle and threw some fuel into the grate; then he withdrew, taking the shovel, tongs, and poker with him. On this my secretary entered and handed me a note thus worded:

"It is impossible to move the lock of the iron gate opening on the Rue Bonaparte; it is full of sand; but the garden gate is made fast."

I rang the bell a second time. Ringué and Champy now entered in their turn, and each one took up the position I had appointed for him, whilst Leroy turned the key in the glass door and pushed the bolt. Voirbo turned pale and cast a bewildered look around him. His lips had become blanched, and a slight shiver, which he did his best to master, shook his frame. At last he was mine, really mine, without bother or fuss! He was arrested without knowing it, caught in his own trap. On the occasion of his first visit, on the 13th of February, in this identical room, I was still undecided, I wanted to see my man at work to be able to take his measure. A fortnight later on, I knew him and knew what he was worth. On seeing the various precautions that had been taken, he wished to rise and withdraw.

"No, remain seated. You were good enough to favour me just now with your ideas respecting Bodasse's murderers. You shall now know my feeling on the same subject. Your visit here this morning forestalls the one I intended to pay you in the course of the day, with the view of putting an end to this comedy. I will begin at the end by informing you that you are the responsible author of Rifer's death."

"Indeed! Is it my fault if a sot kills himself with drink?" exclaimed Voirbo with feigned indignation.

"It is you who was the cause of that attack of *delirium tremens*, to which he has succumbed. For some days you have been working on the unhappy man's ruling passion. It was you who saturated with alcohol that body, which was already almost burnt up with it, so as to bring about the final maddening attack, and you succeeded only too well."

"And pray what could have been my motive?"

"Why, your motive was the one you have been obeying with such desperation, and which you had an interest in obeying—to find a culprit—to obtain an avowal from him of having murdered Bodasse. Rifer was the man you had chosen for that purpose. His easy good-nature, his weakness of character, his chronic state of drunkenness, gave you the opportunity of getting everything from him. '*The end of the week*,' so you wrote to me, '*will not go by without bringing a solution*.' That end of the week has come round, and your solution is a heartrending one! One more corpse is added to your account. You were relying on impunity. It has lasted much too long for you; but, from this moment, you may bid farewell to all your illusions. An old legal saying tells us that half the murderers are caught through their own stupidity; it might be added that criminals like you betray themselves through their excessive precautions. You are clever and formidable; but the most circumspect never think of everything, and it is excessive precaution which has betrayed you. The psychological moment has struck for you. *You are ripe*, and for that very reason, *fit to be plucked. Monsieur Voirbo, I arrest you.*"

"Your warrant, if you please, for acting thus."

"Here is the warrant you ask for. I have had it in my possession since the 11th of February. From the discretionary one it was, I now make it a peremptory one."

"But it is your duty to justify the rigorous measures you are adopting with me, by proofs. It is not sufficient to charge and arrest an honourable citizen, a married man holding a good position, and well known."

"I expected these grand words, Monsieur Voirbo, but they are of no avail. We are not at the Folies-Belleville. You say you are innocent. Well, let us proceed together to an examination of your conscience."

"I am ready to answer you on all points."

"I know you are a very cautious man, and while relying on impunity, you have prepared your defence and studied your replies in the unlikely event of my asking you any explanations. All that will be of no avail to you. Like a child with a house of cards, I could, if necessary, topple the whole of your edifice over by one blow, but I prefer

giving myself the satisfaction of bringing it down piecemeal. If you have prepared your defence tactics, I, on my part, have studied my plan of attack. I have also anticipated everything, and I have in my possession evidence which shall overwhelm you. To begin with, look at those two constables. You are staring hard enough at them, and yet their faces awaken no kind of recollection, do they? Well, I will freshen up your memory. Those are the constables you met in the Carrefour de Buci, on the night between Monday, the 21st, and Tuesday, the 22nd of December last. I fancy, judging by the expression of your face, that you distinctly remember that occurrence. You were very clever on that occasion. By telling them you were a political informer, which was true enough, and by wishing to show them two hams you had just brought from Langres, whence you said you had come, and which was a falsehood, you succeeded in inspiring them with confidence. The fact was, you were simply coming from your home in the Rue Mazarine, and your pretended hams were poor Bodasse's two legs, which you were taking to the well in the Rue Princesse, after having tied them up, like your work, in some tailor's wraps."

"All you are saying is a tissue of informers' falsehoods. Those two constables want to come to the fore; I swear they have lied, and that they are scoundrels."

"If you can only defend yourself with insults, I pity you. Let us proceed: You say you do not recognise those two men, and yet you know them, for there is no other way of accounting for your nocturnal visit to me, and your entrance here by way of the garden an hour ago. You avoided them too carefully for fear of being recognised by them. My inquiries have established that Désiré Bodasse spent the last day of his existence with you, namely, Monday, the 14th of December. I can prove your presence together at the optician's on the Quai de Conti, at the Bains du Paon, and at the eating-house styled the 'Rabbit's Squeak.' No one has seen Désiré since the evening of the 14th December. On Thursday, the 17th, at eight o'clock in the morning, your former lodging in the Rue Mazarine had just been scrubbed out. Contrary to your usual custom, you arose very early on that day, and, in opposition to your habits,

you did your charwoman's work. You must have had grave reasons for that. You did this because it was in your room that you killed and cut up your friend."

"All this is so much argument; where are the proofs?"

"The proofs will come at the proper time, only be patient. On that same day, Thursday, the 17th of December, one of Désiré's thighs is found in the Seine, close to the Pont des Saints-Pères; the bone of the other thigh is picked up in the drain of the Rue Jacob, and then different pieces of the same body are successively found in various parts of the canal and the Seine. On Saturday, the 19th, you are seen with a basket, at eleven o'clock at night, close to the laundry-boat, moored below the Pont Lafayette. The owner of this boat asks you what you are doing there, to which you reply: 'To-morrow is Sunday; I am baiting,' and you throw in the water pieces of flesh, which you take from your basket. On the 1st January you pay your rent—being then one quarter in arrear—with an Italian bond, which used to belong to Bodasse. On the following day you sell your furniture, on the 5th of January you move, and on the 7th you get married.

"You are acquainted with Bodasse's room, since you have slept there. After the murder, you returned a dozen times to this room during the night, taking care that no one should see you. And in order to make the neighbours think that your victim was still alive and at home, you lit candles, and kept his cuckoo-clock going. But from the moment a watch is kept by some political police agents in the poor man's chamber, no more visits are paid to it. The clock stops and darkness reigns supreme. This was because you had seen and recognised these officials, one of whom informed you of what was going on one Sunday evening when you had some refreshment with him. You were careful not to enter the house again. Your plans had been formed a long time previously and you skilfully and boldly carried them out.

"In order to keep yourself well informed as to the various phases of the inquiry, you placed yourself at my disposal. The nearer you saw danger, the more importunate you became. Whilst keeping up communications with me, you fancied you knew what I was doing, and did your best to mislead me; whereas it was my aim, in making use of you,

to study you, to watch you, and to keep you under this hand which to-day comes down so heavily on your shoulder. You were credulous, you thought you were fooling me, and it is you who have been played with. Too much cleverness and too much audacity! In placing Rifer's dead body between us, you thought you were strengthening your game; you acted imprudently in this respect. You innocently believed that I would content myself by following you into the entanglement in which you wished to involve me. Certainly not! I thrust aside the dead man and seize the living one. That living one is yourself! and I now bring you back to your original starting-point, namely, the Carrefour de Buci."

"You have not got me yet. Rifer in his madness saw the old man's head turning round and round him—and you think you already see mine cut off and at your feet. But take care you are not deceived in your turn. My head is still firm and fast on the shoulders that carry it—and it will not be your conjectures, which are far too fanciful, that will cause it to fall. You have arrayed against me a string of suppositions, plausible up to a certain point I admit, that does honour to your young but over-vivid imagination. You have had both time and opportunity to build up—that is the expression you made use of just now—an accusation on presumptions, insidiously coupled with Désiré Bodasse's murder. I will victoriously combat your system, into which you have endeavoured to make everything fit. I intend to defend my innocence, my liberty, my life. If everything you have just brought forward were true, I would certainly be a great criminal; but the attitude taken up by yourself towards me, demands, not presumptions, but plain proofs, and that is where I have you. Can you cite one single material fact? No, you do not even show me the motive of the crime you lay to my charge."

"The motive is clear enough: you wished to get possession of Bodasse's money and valuables, to have them figure in your marriage contract."

"I married without any kind of contract, as you can easily ascertain. If your other information is no better than this, I pity the examining magistrate. Are you even certain that the two legs found in the well of the Rue Princesse are Désiré's at all? The two medical men you

sent for took them for a woman's legs. The third, a legal expert, more sharp-witted than the others, has pompously declared, after a microscopic examination, that they were a man's. And yet a married man, whom you took to the Morgue, has formally declared that he recognised in them those of his wife, who disappeared, at the same time as Bodasse. And observe that that woman has not been found. But enough as to the question of sex. Only, why should those two legs, whether man's or woman's, belong to Désiré rather than to anyone else? People disappear every day. It is probably the old trussmaker, of the Rue de Nesles, who pretends to recognise the legs of her nephew, Désiré, doubtless with the hope of inheriting what he has left behind him. You must see, therefore, that your accusation has not a leg to stand upon. Besides, how can you say that one man only has committed such a crime, without the aid of an accomplice?"

"That is perfectly admissible. Being old and feeble, Bodasse could not resist very long. You probably struck him unawares. To my mind you were the sole actor in that dark tragedy."

"You forget you have not yet found the head. That red dot above the two legs would make your success complete."

"You are becoming impertinent, Monsieur Voirbo. I think it is time to have done with you. A quarter of an hour ago you dropped at my feet a card with a steamer printed upon it; that tells me that you purpose leaving France. Only lately married and settled down, I cannot imagine the necessity of this departure, which to my mind looks very much like flight."

"You are again mistaken. Here is the card. I was going to send it to a friend living in Lyons. After all, assuming that I did intend leaving, that would not prove me to be a criminal."

"Monsieur Leroy, be good enough to close the curtains, and you, Ringué, make that man undress, and search his clothes very carefully."

Voirbo silently took off his things, which Ringué minutely inspected. In his pockets were found a purse containing twenty francs, a knife, a tobacco-pouch, some cigarette-papers, and a box of blue-tipped wax matches, like those

found in the grate of Bodasse's room. No trace of violence was to be found on Voirbo's body. The inspection at an end, he put his things on again.

Meanwhile, I was examining his hat, the tall hat so often mentioned. The manufacturer's name was not visible inside; it had, somehow or other, been removed. Of all a criminal's garments, it is the hat which usually has the greatest surprises in reserve. Whilst passing my hand over part of the lining, to account for a crease I saw in the material, I felt a slight projection under my fingers. I therefore removed this lining, and found a small razor-blade, without its handle, on the back of which was frosted the English word "Thursday."

"Why have you a razor-blade inside your hat?"

"I intended to take it to a cutler to get him to put a handle to it, and, being afraid of cutting myself, I placed it there."

On looking through the contents of the pocket-book, I found in it, amongst unimportant papers, the receipt for a passage from Havre to New York, booked in the name of Saba.

"Is your friend who lives at Lyons called Saba? What is his address in that town?"

"I refuse to answer."

"On what grounds, if you please?"

"You would mix my friend up with the inquiry you have on hand, and with your determination to see in me nothing but a great criminal, you would find means of compromising him likewise."

"We will go together to the shipping office, and——"

"I shall not go."

"Well, then, to your own house?"

"Nor there either."

"Then I will go by myself, and I shall take care to mention your refusal in my official report."

"You may do what you like."

"One more question; of course you need not answer it unless so disposed: Used not this little ivory-handled knife that you had in your waistcoat pocket, and on the blade of which I see 'Langres,' to belong to Bodasse?"

"It did not. It was given to me by one of my workwomen."

"What is her name, if you please?"

"It is useless to tell you."

"Well, her christian-name is 'Aline.' I should add that the person in question lives at Langres, and that you saw her in Paris in the course of the second fortnight of last January."

As Voirbo seemed to have made up his mind to answer no further inquiries, it became useless to question him any longer.

"Be good enough," I said to my secretary, "to see that Voirbo has some breakfast in my private room, under the guard of Ringué and Champy. I shall take him this afternoon to Monsieur Douet D'Arcq, the examining magistrate. In the meantime, I will call at the shipping office. Voirbo's refusal to accompany me there, strikes me as being very significant. The ticket from Havre to New York, booked in the name of Saba, must be for himself."

On reaching the office at No. 2, Rue Drouot, I asked whether, on the previous day, they had not been called upon by an individual of such and such a description, who was desirous of proceeding to America.

"The description you are giving me," replied a clerk, "tallies precisely with that of a Monsieur Saba, who took a passage yesterday for New York. He inquired the most rapid means of reaching the West Indies. He was to be at Havre by five o'clock to-night, to embark on board the American packet, the 'Fulton.' When I booked his place, he produced a military furlough, a certificate of good conduct, a shooting-licence, and a voter's card, all in the name of Victor Saba, farmer at Aubervilliers."

I left the office extremely puzzled. "This Voirbo," I thought, "is the possessor of quite an assortment of documents in the name of Saba. That makes another mystery in the man's life."

CHAPTER XV.

MADAME VOIRBO.—THE DOMICILIARY SEARCH.

By means of special reports I had informed the Public Prosecutor, as well as the Prefect of Police, of the circumstances of Rifer's death and Voirbo's arrest. At one o'clock in the afternoon, I took the latter to the Palais de Justice in the close custody of constables Ringué and Champy. Monsieur Douet d'Arcq put the customary preliminary questions to the prisoner. Voirbo refused to answer, and would not even give full details as to his status, declaring they could do with him as they wished, but that he was decided to offer no kind of explanation.

"I shall wait," he added, "till the police prove my guilt. Accused of a crime punishable by death, I intend leaving nothing to chance. Appearances are dead against me; but in a few days, to-morrow, within an hour perhaps, they may turn in my favour, and I do not mean to imperil the chances of success remaining to me by answers you will interpret to suit yourselves. You can readily understand that I am by no means disposed to pay with my own head a crime committed by someone else."

"I observe," said the examining magistrate, "that your attitude is not that of an innocent man. Although I may not as yet have in my possession material proofs that you are the sole, or at all events the principal author of the crime, the particulars I do possess make me at least believe in your complicity, and by refusing to answer my questions you strengthen me in my surmise. If, as you pretend, you are innocent, give me the opportunity of establishing the fact. I only seek the truth, it is to your interest to help me in my task, since you state yourself that you are innocent of Bodasse's murder."

"It is not for me to prove to you that I am innocent; on the contrary, it is your duty to demonstrate by actual facts that I am guilty."

"Will you tell me, I ask, whether it is true you were going to embark this very night at Havre for New York?"

"I shall no more answer that question than the preceding ones."

"Are you disposed to sign, with my clerk and myself, the official report of what has just passed between us?"

"I shall sign nothing."

"Your answers force me to convert the warrant I had issued against you into a warrant of commitment. But before ordering your removal to the Mazas prison, I intend leaving you a few days longer in the hands of the Commissary of Police, who will bring you here again next Tuesday at noon. Between now and then you will have ample time to reflect, and I advise you to do so."

"You still persist," I asked in my turn, "in refusing to accompany me to your private residence?" The prisoner replied by an affirmative nod.

"Ringué and Champy, you will take this man back to my office, and you will keep him there until my return. Under no pretext is he to communicate with anyone whatsoever."

That afternoon, at three o'clock, I arrived with my secretary at No. 26, Rue Lamartine, the prisoner's residence. Madame Voirbo received us in her husband's workroom and informed us that he was away from home for a few days.

"I am not one of your husband's customers, but the Commissary of Police of the Odéon district."

"Monsieur Macé?"

"Himself."

"My husband has mentioned your name to me in connection with a fictitious marriage he is supposed to have contracted in England. It seems that you were charged with looking into that matter. When telling you, a moment ago, that my husband was away from Paris, I was not deceiving you; it was his intention to start for London to-day at noon, for the purpose of obtaining proofs of the invalidity of this marriage. His bag is packed, and I am beginning to feel anxious, for I have seen nothing of him since he went out this morning at six o'clock."

"Has not your husband told you anything further?"

"What about, sir?"

"With respect to proceedings that might be taken against him in connection with another matter."

"You mean the seditious words he uttered at a meeting at Belleville—he was, indeed, afraid of being arrested."

"I am not referring to that; it is a question of a much more serious matter."

"I do not understand you."

"Has not Monsieur Voirbo ever mentioned to you a retired old gentleman named Désiré Bodasse, who used to live in the Rue Dauphine?"

"The name has never been mentioned in my presence."

"That old gentleman has been murdered—"

"Poor man!"

"And your husband, who was his friend, is seriously compromised——"

"My husband? Monsieur Voirbo?—he—Pierre, a murderer? Nonsense, sir!—you must be mad! I, a murderer's wife! I might have guessed as much. Justice is blind—the police have made a mistake."

The young woman's painful stupefaction was terrible to behold, and I experienced at the moment a sinking of the heart at the thought of the dreadful revelations I had to make to her; but stern duty was before me; silence was out of the question—and besides, sooner or later, she was bound to learn the horrible truth. I therefore went on:

"It is you, madame, who has been, and who is still being deceived. But call up your courage. You will require it badly when you learn what I am obliged to tell you."

"You terrify me!"

I hesitated for a moment, and was tempted not to disclose the whole truth to this most unhappy woman. But she seized my hands now with frenzy; now again with suppliant and heart-rending accent she exclaimed:

"But speak; speak, pray! I insist! I demand it of you! I wish to know all! Can you not see that your silence is killing me? Tell me the truth, terrible as it may be, I insist upon knowing it. Strike the blow, but strike it quickly!"

"Be it so, madame; you shall know all. Your husband, Pierre Voirbo, is thief, forger, bigamist, and murderer!"

"Enough! No more! What you are saying is monstrous! If you were not one of the representatives of the

law I would call out 'Help! murder!' and my neighbours would assist me in turning you out of the house."

"Pray, madame, be calm. Whatever you do, avoid an exposure, which can do me no harm, and which would solely reflect on yourself. I know that my mission is a painful one at this moment, and all the more so, madame, as I know you to be an orphan, without a single near relative to soften your sorrow. I have heard of the great love you bore your father and mother, but lately deceased. I know how far you carried respect and filial devotion. I am not unacquainted with the antipathy you at first felt towards Monsieur Voirbo, whose political and irreligious ideas were shared by your parents, but not by yourself. On their death-bed you promised them that you would marry Pierre Voirbo, and, in order to keep a promise made to these dying ones, you consented to become the wife of a man whose sentiments were in opposition to your own. Character, manners, education, habit, everything weaned you from him. But you were obedient, as became a dutiful child. Your own longings were for a conventual life, in which you had grown up. You had become enthusiastic for those holy maidens, who, with admirable self-denial and great charity, help the poor, tend the sick, and watch by the bedside of the dying. You wished to follow the example of that saintly sisterhood, scattered about the world, to whom the rich have recourse in misfortune, whom the poor look for in their misery, and whom *savants* and explorers meet in most distant lands, surrounded by general veneration, even by that of savages. But your parents, gulled by Voirbo's oily tongue, combined with him to save you, in their own words, *from the priests*, and you obeyed by linking your own existence to that of a wretch."

Madame Voirbo's face was bathed in tears. "Who, pray," she asked, "has taken the liberty to give you these details about my family and myself?"

"The people who, at the time you were living in the Rue Bonaparte, had opportunities for appreciating your gentleness and goodness. You surely do not blame them for having enlightened me as to your virtues, and for having held you up to me as a victim, when I might have believed you your husband's accomplice?"

Madame Voirbo burst into sobs, and raising her handkerchief to her eyes, slowly moved in the direction of her bedroom, the door of which she left open. There I beheld her fall upon her knees before a table fitted up as an altar, and above which, nestling in the midst of the season's flowers, could be seen two framed portraits. I heard her murmur in choking accents:

"I obeyed you; but see my sufferings. Ah! you know now the extent of your daughter's misfortunes."

Little by little the sobs ceased, and she became lost in a kind of mystic adoration. From feelings of delicacy, which will be readily understood, I had not followed her into her room. When, on becoming calmer and more resigned, she rose and returned to the workroom, she thanked me for my consideration; then wiping her eyes and resolutely brushing back her hair, which had fallen about her face, she said:

"I am now ready to submit to every kind of humiliation. Speak; I will obey."

"Will you have the goodness to tell me, madame, what is the nature of your marriage settlement?"

"No contract was drawn up. We decided to enjoy our property in common. I was the possessor of a dowry of fifteen thousand francs in various French securities, payable to bearer. Monsieur Voirbo possessed ten thousand francs in Italian bonds. He must still have these bonds, for he has continually informed me that they were unsaleable, in consequence of a great fall they had undergone. It was a portion of my money which paid our marriage expenses and the cost of furnishing."

"Where are your securities?"

"In this casket," said she, opening the wardrobe and taking from it a small box, which she handed to me.

"The casket is not very heavy. Have you the key of it?"

"My husband has it."

"That is strange. He had no keys about him this morning."

"How do you know?"

"I had him searched."

"He is arrested, then?"

"Yes, madame, I am here to search the premises."

Madame Voirbo heaved a deep sigh of grief. "As you please, sir. I am strong and resolute. I can bear to see and hear all."

By means of the blade of a knife I forced the lock of the casket. I had not been mistaken; it was empty!

Madame Voirbo stood amazed. "Who can have robbed me?"

"Your own husband, madame. Your securities can't be very far from those which he told you were his. They are sure to be all together in the travelling-bag he packed himself."

"But was he, then, leaving me; going to run away from me?"

"I have every reason to believe so. He yesterday, under the false name of Victor Saba, booked and paid for a passage, not to London, whither he told you he was obliged to go, but to New York, with the intention of going much further, that is to say, to the West Indies. He was to have embarked to-night at Havre, on an American liner, the 'Fulton.'"

"The wretch! Then what you have told me is really true? Oh, the coward!"

With a nervous gesture she now pulled a travelling-bag from a cupboard and threw it in the middle of the floor. Like the casket, it was locked. I set about forcing it, and in the midst of body-linen and wearing apparel I found a sum of a thousand francs in different notes on the Bank of France; French securities payable to bearer, with memoranda of the purchase of the same in the name of Rémondé. I returned these securities to Madame Voirbo, who was their rightful owner. I continued to search for the Italian bonds, but without success. As I was giving utterance to my disappointment, the young woman remarked to me:

"I am certain, however, I saw some Italian bonds in Monsieur Voirbo's possession; he showed them to me both before and since our marriage."

"Quite so, madame. We shall probably come across them in the course of our search."

I finished my examination of the contents of the bag, when I discovered in a side-pocket a somewhat peculiar razor-case. It was of Russian leather, and was about four inches long. There were seven divisions to hold a like number of blades, all of which could be used with the

same handle, the latter having a place of its own in the case. Each of these little blades, to the number of six, bore the name, in English, of one of the days of the week, frosted on the back. The blade I had found inside Voirbo's hat was the complement of the set. Voirbo must therefore have told me a lie when he stated it was his intention to take this blade to a cutler with the view of having a handle fitted to it. In hiding it inside his hat, he could only have been actuated by two motives: either the intention of committing a fresh crime, or of taking his own life in case of surprise and arrest. This last hypothesis seemed to me the most likely one.

In another pocket of the bag I found a striped-coloured handkerchief, marked V. S. in red cotton, a military furlough, a certificate of good conduct, a shooting-licence, and an elector's card, all in the name of Victor Saba. These were the documents Voirbo had handed in at the shipping agency in the Rue Drouot, to establish his identity.

"I am now obliged, madame, to make a general examination of your premises. I am seeking for a material proof of Voirbo's guilt. This step is indispensable. My secretary and I will examine, in detail, the contents of your rooms; but do not be uneasy, we shall put everything back in its place as far as possible. Remain seated, and leave everything to us."

"This is a fresh torture you are about to subject me to," replied Madame Voirbo; "I am ready to submit to it, but allow me to accompany you. I will in no way thwart the execution of your duty. I shall be satisfied with looking on, and will say nothing further but ask you to respect this table, which I have piously converted into an altar, and adorned with these chrysanthemums and heather, for beneath it there stands a small trunk of black wood, containing nothing except the last souvenirs of my poor mother. Promise me, sir, you will not touch those relics, so precious to me."

"Your wishes shall be respected."

The Voirbos' rooms looked on to the yard, and were five in number: lobby, dining-room, kitchen, bedroom, and workroom. The bed was completely taken to pieces, the pictures were unhooked from the walls; the cupboards, wardrobes,

and drawers opened, the marble tops of the furniture lifted off, everything was minutely searched; but nowhere could I discover a trace of the securities that had belonged to Bodasse. In the workroom I found, under the marble chimney-piece, a large envelope containing different certificates in English. On examining these, I noticed that the names, Ellen Ball and Peter Voirbo were often repeated. These were documents relating to the marriage contracted in England. I carefully examined two sewing-machines. In the groove of the one that had been brought from the Rue Mazarine, I noticed some clotted blood. I drew my secretary's attention to this.

"True enough!" he replied, "but an isolated trace of blood is no significant proof. That may be easily accounted for by pleading bleeding at the nose, or a prick with the machine-needle."

"Have you, Monsieur Leroy, had a look at the shelves serving for a bookcase? It may be of use to make a note of the books, pamphlets and newspapers that are there; they very often help one to form a correct opinion of their owner."

"No, sir, I have not; I thought it best to leave that duty to you. Whilst you are examining them, I will commence writing out the draught of your official report of seizure."

I looked through Voirbo's literary belongings. I first took up a bundle of songs; next I found various letters, three of which were signed *Aline*, and had come from Langres, while the postmarks bore the dates, October 11th, November 22nd, December 13th, 1868. These letters referred to the sending of pieces of cloth and provisions, such as clarified butter, chestnuts, honey and ginger-bread. Amongst the newspapers, giving accounts of certain public meetings, there were some containing reports of the arrest, trial, sentence, and execution of the butcher Avinain. On the 16th of March, 1867, that murderer had cut up a Monsieur Vincent, a corn-chandler; then on the 26th of June, following, he had subjected Monsieur Duguet, a farmer, to the same fate. It was this sinister cutter-up of men who, on the morning of his execution, had called the executioner and his assistants cowards, because of their dilatoriness, while preparing him for the guillotine. It was this

terrible criminal who, at the foot of the scaffold, said, with his most gracious smile, to the officials on duty: "Good-bye, gentlemen!" Then turning towards the crowd, he added in a sententious tone of voice: "Never confess!—Never confess!"

Was Voirbo an admirer and imitator of this atrocious ruffian, and was he desirous, a year later, of renewing his deeds and words with more success? The means employed by one criminal are always, and that soon afterwards, imitated by others. I seized these papers as well as several others, which gave an account of two mysterious crimes, the murder of a market-gardener, of Aubervilliers, who was found at night in his cart with his throat cut by a razor, and the murder of a female servant, named Marie Louise Carton, residing at No. 37 Rue Saint-Placide. Her neighbour, Doctor Robinet, had been the first to attend to the girl, but she had expired in his arms without having regained consciousness. I also took possession of various newspapers giving accounts of the "Affair of the Rue Princesse." People, as a rule, generally only keep such papers as interest them. Why should Voirbo keep those relating to the butcher Avinain, to the crime of Aubervilliers, the Rue Saint-Placide, and the Rue Princesse? My mind was made up so far as concerned the affair of the Rue Princesse, but not as to the two others, the authors of which had remained unknown. Could Voirbo be the culprit?

After having examined the bookcase I passed on to the work-table, which consisted of a plank a yard square, on which various tailor's tools were scattered about: thimbles, reels of thread of different numbers and colours, pieces of soap, wax, candle, and chalk. There was, in addition, a walnut plank, used by tailors to iron seams on and to press the cloth, and also a small piece of wood, about eight inches long, on which was nailed an old bit of metal and which served as a stand for the hot irons. Some very conspicuous objects were a pair of large scissors, newly ground, and two flat-irons, commonly called *geese*, weighing each about fifteen pounds. These last two articles particularly attracted my attention. Could it have been with one of them that Voirbo had struck Désiré Bodasse? These

heavy lumps of iron were sufficient to kill a man at the first blow.

In the midst of the confusion and disorder of the work-table, a singular utensil attracted my attention. This article was not unknown to me. It was the counterpart of one of those redoubtable instruments left behind by the bold burglars who, in the previous December, had during the night broken into and rifled several shops, and spread terror amongst the tradespeople of the Sixth Arrondissement. I had before me the large bobbin composed of various metals and cast in a mould. I had found the magic hammer, combining at the same time strength and silence. After carefully examining it, I looked, but in vain, for the handle, that whalebone handle, flexible and elastic, which has already been described, and which was in perfect harmony with the qualities of the hammer.

"That bobbin, which seems to interest you so much," Madame Voirbo remarked, "is used by my husband to keep the cloth down on his table, when he is cutting anything out. My father used to have, for the same purpose, a brass weight, which you will find in the kitchen. Every tailor makes use of whatever he happens to have at hand."

"I shall take possession of this utensil, madame, for it may be of use in our inquiry."

Then addressing myself to my secretary, I said to him: "Voirbo must have acted as indicator to those rogues who used to swoop down upon Paris at different periods; those gangs which Crinsip, at the Rue Christine station, had recommended to the vigilance of the police constables on the night between the 21st and 22nd of December, and so induced Ringué and Champy to take up their position in the Carrefour de Buici."

"Yes, yes, I remember—the night when they spoke to *the man with the hams.*"

"You recollect, I daresay, that, when referring to the two parcels, they spoke of some labels of the Eastern Railway? Well! a closer examination would have shown them that the pretended traveller, who said that he had just come from Langres, was telling them a downright lie. The labels which Voirbo had pasted on the bundle, containing not a couple of hams, as he made out, but, on the contrary, the

legs of his friend, Bodasse, were, I am positive, judging by the letters I have just discovered, those he had taken from the parcels sent by the girl Aline, and forwarded from Langres to Paris by *goods* train. If Voirbo had really come from Langres, his packages would have borne *luggage* labels, and not those used for *goods* trains. The more I think of it, the more I am convinced that this man supplied the information for the thefts to be committed. His residence and marriage in England, his frequent journeys abroad, his meeting, on the 15th of last August, with the two Englishmen at the Café Belge, which Gloria told us of, all this proves that Voirbo is affiliated to an international band, composed of pick-pockets, house-breakers, chloroformists, and shop-lifters.

In the kitchen, I took possession of some string of the same kind as that tied round the bundle containing Bodasse's legs, also of a butcher's chopper, and of an iron mould used by tinkers for casting metal. My examination of the lodging being now at an end, I said to Madame Voirbo:

"In order that my search may be complete, I must also inspect your cellar."

"It will be labour in vain; it contains nothing but two casks of wine, both untouched as yet."

"I have heard of those two casks of wine. Your door-keeper spoke to me of them as though they were wonders. But all the same, I must see your cellar."

"I will go with you, then, to prevent any more gossip."

On reaching the cellar, I found that it contained nothing except two full casks, lying side by side. The ground was smooth, and did not appear to have been disturbed. On drawing near to these casks with a light, in order to examine the labels affixed to them, I noticed that the bung of the one nearest the wall projected. On examining it more closely, I found that a black lace, one end of which was fastened to a hoop, passed through the bunghole into the cask. I knocked the bung out, and, pulling at the lace, I brought out something that had been plunged in the liquid. It was a cylindrical tin case, made on the model of those formerly used by soldiers, when travelling, to keep their route or furlough in. The lid of this case had been soldered

on. Returning upstairs, I knocked the bottom out, and found inside—Désiré Bodasse's Italian bonds. Only one of them was missing; the one Voirbo had made use of to pay his rent to Monsieur Bethmont. Madame Voirbo was astounded.

"I am going mad," she exclaimed, after a moment's stupor. "That man must be a demon! Wretched woman that I am!" And she dropped on to a chair.

I then said to my secretary: "Be so good as to draw up an inventory of the articles I have seized;" and I dictated:

"1. Various documents written in English, found under the marble chimney-slab in Voirbo's workroom, apparently referring to his first marriage contracted in England.

"2. Some military papers, a shooting-licence, an elector's card in the name of Victor Saba.

"3. A coloured handkerchief marked with the initials V. S.

"4. Some letters dated Langres, and signed: Aline.

"5. A collection of newspapers treating of various crimes.

"6. A bobbin of alloy metal, a kind of hammer used by English and American burglars.

"7. The two tailor's 'geese' or flat-irons.

"8. A pair of tailor's scissors.

"9. Some pieces of string.

"10. A butcher's chopper.

"11. An iron mould for casting metals.

"12. Some Italian bonds, the property of Désiré Bodasse, found in a tin case secreted in a cask of wine.

"13. The case containing these bonds."

Addressing myself to Madame Voirbo, I asked her if she had a photograph of her husband. Her reply was in the negative. Leroy having now completed the draught of this report of the seizure, read it out aloud. I requested Madame Voirbo to append her signature beside my own at the foot of this document.

"Is this formality necessary?"

"Yes, madame, it proves the correctness of my proceedings in your presence."

"This will be the only occasion, apart from the signing of

my marriage certificate, that I shall have placed my name at the bottom of an official document. Where am I to sign?"

I pointed out the spot with my finger and offered her the pen. She signed with a trembling hand, then quickly throwing the pen down on the table, she exclaimed :—

"But, now that I think of it—I should be an infamous creature indeed, if by means of my signature affixed to that document I had pronounced my husband's death sentence."

And hastily catching up the report she tore it to pieces.

"You came here to seek for proofs," she added, "convincing proofs, to use your own words; you have found them and are taking them away with you. Why, then, do you require my signature? Neither for good nor evil do I mean to have anything more to do with the miserable wretch whom the world may still call my husband!"

I had not the courage to blame Madame Voirbo for her violence, which, of course, compelled my secretary to write another report; he therefore picked up the pieces and placed them in his pocket-book. A moment afterwards, a commissionaire, fetched by Leroy, took down the trunk in which I had stowed the various objects seized, and placed it on a cab that was waiting at some distance from the house.

On quitting the unhappy young woman, I said to her: "However painful it may be for you, the examining magistrate will require to hear you, and you will receive a summons from him to that effect."

"That's a plucky little woman," Leroy observed to me, when we were seated in the cab.

"But unfortunate above all things. Intelligent, industrious, lady-like; she certainly deserved a better fate. It would indeed have been better for her to have shut herself up in some obscure nunnery, than to have married the odious villain her parents imposed upon her."

"What will become of her now?"

"She may, perhaps, be able to realise the dream of her girlhood by obtaining admission to some religious house. In any case, that is the best thing she could do, for, in the world she is and always will be, in spite of all her good qualities, the wife of Voirbo, the murderer."

On arriving at the office, we found Voirbo finishing his dinner in company with his guardians, Ringué and Champy. When he perceived me, he got up and asked me how his wife had borne my visit.

"Fairly well."

"She protested, I presume, against your intrusion?"

"By no means. She merely thought your absence very strange."

"I think you must understand why I refused to accompany you?"

"Not exactly."

"Well, then, I am afraid of my wife. She is an upright and high-minded person. I love her, but, unfortunately, my love is not reciprocated in proportion to the affection I have for her. But, although she may not love me as I could wish, she esteems me considerably. The least suspicion which might tarnish my respectability would injure me for ever in her opinion. That is why I preferred awaiting events to clear myself, in order to prove to her the mistake of which I am the victim. Might I know the result of your search in my house?"

"What it could not fail to have been. What I have seized is in that trunk. We will go over the things together to-morrow, after my visit to your former lodgings in the Rue Mazarine."

"I demand to accompany you there—it is my right."

"Very well, you shall come; but tell me if there exists anywhere a photograph of yourself?"

"What do you want to do with it?"

"Only to show it to different persons living at Aubervilliers, and to the tenants of No. 37, Rue Saint-Placide."

Voirbo reeled.

"What is the matter? A fainting-fit? That is very unusual for a man of your strength."

"Nothing—nothing," stammered the prisoner, whilst making great efforts to master his uneasiness. "I am only astonished you should ask me for my photograph. I haven't got one."

"Then we will have it taken."

"As for that, never! No authority can force me to that. Even if you were to put me into a strait waistcoat,

as they do with lunatics, I would make such grimaces that the likeness you would get would be more like that of an ape."

"We shall see. In the meantime, Ringué and Champy will take you to the central station in the Place Saint-Sulpice, where they will spend the night with you. To-morrow we shall decide what to do further."

After my dinner I started for Aubervilliers. I was acquainted with the secretary at the mayor's. He was on the best of terms with the inhabitants, and well acquainted with everything that went on in the place. He told me how, one night, on the Route des Quatre-Chemins a man named Bernard had been found dead in his cart, with his throat cut by a razor. The body was warm at the time. As his gold watch and his purse containing a certain sum of money were found on him, people suspected suicide or private revenge. Yet, report said that the old market-gardener was in the habit of carrying his savings, amounting to five thousand francs, about with him, in a double satchel, fastened by means of hooks to the waist band of his trousers. Strange to say, neither the purse nor the contents were ever found, either on his person, or at his home. Bernard was a widower, and childless, and nobody exactly knew what he was worth.

"Used there not to be a man named Victor Saba residing here?"

"Yes, he was Bernard's son-in-law."

"What has become of him?"

"He died from an accident whilst out shooting some four or five years ago, at the Isle-Adam."

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"Here are his papers—his shooting-licence and his elector's card are dated 1868."

"I, too, tell you that is impossible; we had no elections in the year 1868. Those papers must have been falsified."

"You are right after all," I observed, on carefully examining the elector's card. "A 3 has been changed into an 8. This card belongs to 1863, and the shooting-licence to 1865."

The secretary referred to his books and found there:

" August 30th, 1865, shooting-licence issued to Victor Saba." By means of a magnifying glass the change of the 5 into an 8 was distinctly visible.

"That is all I want to know," I said to my friend on taking leave. "Perhaps we are in presence of two additional victims? It is evident that Voirbo knew Bernard and Saba."

CHAPTER XVI.

NO. 47, RUE MAZARINE.—THE TELL-TALE WATER-BOTTLE.

THE two adjoining houses, numbered 47 and 49, in the Rue Mazarine, seem to have had the same origin; in bygone days they probably formed one house. Their construction is identical: façade, windows, pent-house, everything is similar. Although inside there may be a party wall, this separation is only indicated outside by the water-pipe descending from the roof. On beholding the two houses from the street one might compare them to twin sisters. The only external difference exists in the windows. Those of No. 47, an old-established lodging house, are provided with Venetian blinds; whilst the casements of No. 49 are protected by shutters, which are always fastened by padlocks, and can scarcely be set ajar to permit a little air to enter the rooms, in which a mysterious semi-obscurity reigns. This is owing to a police regulation affecting houses of ill-fame. No. 49 was then, and still is, one of these; hence the difference between its windows and those of its neighbour, No. 47. This *lay convent* is known in the Latin Quarter by the name of "The Truss of Straw." According to the old servant, police-constable Ringué's friend, this name owed its origin to the sign of a corn-chandler, who had occupied the house once upon a time. The better to advertise his calling, he hung up a specimen of his wares outside his shop.

On Sunday, the 28th of February, at eleven o'clock in the morning, I entered No. 47 for the purpose of proceeding to an examination of Pierre Voirbo's former lodging. A long, narrow passage leads from the street to the staircase, at the foot of which is placed a tap for water. The water-closets of the third floor are erected in a corner of the staircase, not far from a window opening on to the yard; they are only a few steps from the door of the room which Voirbo had occupied.

There was only one lodger on that landing, Monsieur Barta. The nature of his occupation did not allow him to return home till a late hour of the night. The two rooms, being contiguous, were only separated by a thin partition. Before entering the prisoner's former abode I questioned Monsieur Barta.

"In such a house as this," he remarked, "in which the rooms are so close together, it seems, to me, difficult to admit that a murder can have been committed without arousing the attention of the neighbours. On Sundays, the only days I am able to be at home, I occasionally saw Monsieur Voirbo, and on no occasion have I observed the least thing unusual in his attitude, nor have I ever heard any suspicious noises in his apartment. However, towards the end of December, I noticed, several nights, a disagreeable smell in which phenic acid predominated. I asked a wine-shop keeper, the principal tenant, if anyone had died in the house. His reply was in the negative. The unpleasant smell having ceased, I thought no more of this incident, the origin of which still remains unknown to me."

For the sake of making my investigations as perfect as possible, I had caused Widow Pertant, Voirbo's former charwoman, and also Madame Bethmont, the principal tenant, to accompany me. The latter observed:

"The lodging you are about to visit is, at present, occupied by a young couple. They have only been lately married, and are fishmongers at the Marché Saint-Germain. They scarcely count forty summers between them, and are only occupying the room temporarily, whilst waiting till they have furnished a home."

"Has the room been done up?"

"No, but, previous to these young people's coming-in, I cleaned it out thoroughly, without noticing anything out of the way."

"Are your new lodgers at home?"

"They are generally in at this time."

I went up to the door and knocked gently. A young woman opened and I entered, followed by Madame Bethmont and Widow Pertant. The table was laid; the newly-married couple were preparing to take their breakfast before a bright coke fire. After having announced my rank and

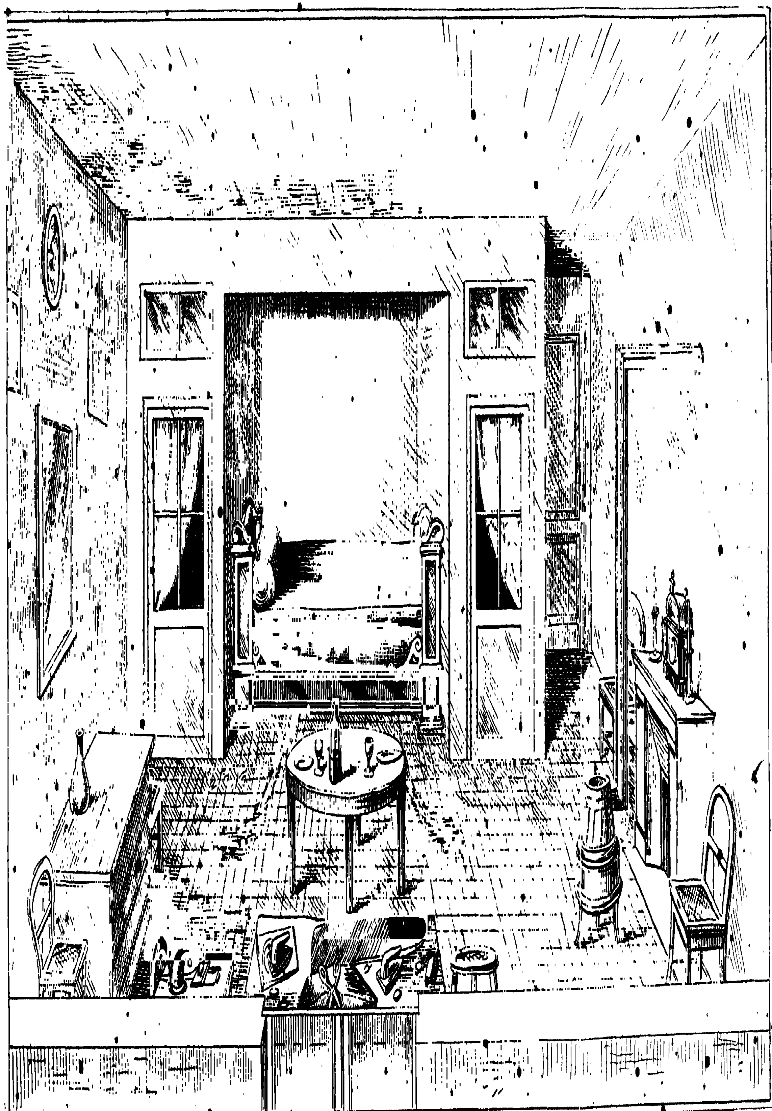
the object of my visit, I apologised for the momentary inconvenience I was causing them, and then I informed them that Voirbo would be brought up by the constables. This struck me as being a matter of indifference to them.

I examined the room in which I found myself. Order and cleanliness existed everywhere, the tile floor was spotless, and there was nothing in the room to lead one to suppose that a murder had been committed in it. The apartment, which was a spacious one, had only a single window, receiving its light from the street. Facing this window was an alcove, situated between two small closets. The fireplace was on the left when entering. As in most old houses, there was a rather decided slope in the flooring. I requested Widow Pertant to point out to me the position of every piece of furniture when Voirbo used to occupy the room, adding:

"Be very exact, madame, for, in addition to my present investigations, I shall be obliged to draw up a plan of the apartment for the use of the authorities."

"It is easy enough," was her reply. "Here under the window his work-table used to stand; it was not so high as to prevent the window opening; on the right, and not far from the work-table, was the sewing machine; along that wall, facing the fireplace, there used to be a chest of drawers, surmounted by a looking-glass; a chair stood on either side of the fireplace; on the mantelpiece was a zinc clock; and in front of the grate a tailor's stove, the pipe of which, passing above the glass shade of the clock, disappeared inside the wall by the hole you can see about half a yard below the ceiling. The bed was naturally in the alcove, and in the closets on either side there used to be wearing apparel and a large trunk. In the centre of the apartment there stood a round table as now."

Widow Pertant was finishing her description when Voirbo was brought in by Ringué and Champy. They had come in a cab, and had left the vehicle in the Rue de Buci to avoid attracting a crowd in front of the house. I requested the prisoner to sit down on the chair placed to the left of the fireplace. Ringué and Champy remained standing on either side of him. Voirbo seemed self-possessed and confident as to the result of the investigations. Having care-



THE ROOM IN WHICH THE CRIME WAS COMMITTED.

fully taken his precautions, he was convinced that I could discover nothing in the room. I guessed what he was thinking about by the slight cunning smile which at times curled his lips.

"You were saying just now, Madame Pertant, that the only unoccupied portions of this room, according to the position of the furniture, were the space round this table, close to which two persons can easily walk side by side."

"Just so," replied the former charwoman.

"If, as we are supposing," I remarked to my secretary, "Désiré Bodasse was murdered, and then cut up here, the murderer certainly never thought of moving his furniture before striking his victim—"

Voirbo was listening most collectedly. I went on:

"Well! You are now going to see how very important an accessory may be in a criminal case, and how the most trifling detail may serve to complete an inquiry. Observe, that in the matter we have in hand, accessories, and hardly anything else, have led us up to the truth. In the victim's room, at No. 59, Rue Dauphine, candles are lit and the clock is kept going, two accessories of which the object was to put off, as long as possible, the discovery of the crime, and by that means to keep suspicion away from the criminal. At 26, Rue Lamartine, we find a whole pile of newspapers. Some of these contain reports of the trial of the butcher Avinain; while others relate the murder of Bernard, of Aubervilliers, and of the servant girl, Marie Carton, at No. 37, Rue Saint-Placide. The authors of both these crimes have remained unknown. This printed matter, these loose sheets may seem valueless, but, on examining them carefully, we find them to be powerful and most important accessories. Bodasse's murderer is an imitator of Avinain. Like him, he cut up his victim. Avinain confessed; but at the foot of the scaffold, at the moment of suffering for his crime, a cry escaped him, a warning to future murderers: 'Never confess!'—and, in accordance with this precept, Bodasse's murderer has made up his mind to deny everything. But his denial is of no avail. We are on the track of the villain who murdered Marie Carton, and this at the very moment when he was about to be shielded by the act of limitation and we shall discover the man who

cut old Bernard's throat. In short, in this very room, which was once Voirbo's, it is again an accessory which is definitively going to reveal the name of Bodasse's murderer."

Stretching out my arm, I took from the table a bottle full of water, and continued: "In this room there exists a perceptible slope from the window to the alcove. Assuming that a body was cut up here, and that there was an abundant flow of blood, the blood, following the direction of this declivity, must have flowed towards the bed and there formed a pool. I am now going to pour the contents of this bottle on the vacant spots of the tiled floor, the water will follow the same course as the blood did, and, wherever it stops, we shall find material evidence of the crime. This water-bottle will be the tell-tale accessory."

Voirbo's attitude had changed by this time, he was now fidgeting on his chair; his legs were crossed and pressed close together, his fingers twitched, his neck was stretched out, his face grew distorted, and assumed a dirty waxen hue; he breathed with difficulty, his eyes, which were almost starting from their sockets, gazed terror-stricken at the water-bottle, which affected him like the head of Medusa. I emptied the contents of the bottle on the floor, on either side of the table, that is to say between the chest of drawers and the fire-place. There immediately formed a number of streamlets, which flowed in a zig-zag course to the same point, producing the impression of so many adders in search of the same shelter. As I had anticipated, it was under the bed, close to the partition, that these streamlets met and then formed a stationary pool.

The bed having been removed I had the water sponged up, and at the spot where it had collected I requested Monsieur Roussell, a bricklayer, residing in the Rue Guénégaud, to remove some ten tiles, around and beneath which dried blood could be distinctly seen. The gory stream which had settled at this point had little by little filtered in between the tiles. The great quantity of blood, of which the traces were still visible, proved that the corpse must have been cut up while it was still warm. I also had some tiles removed in various other parts of the room, but nothing unusual was found beneath them, Monsieur

Roussell placed the blood-stained tiles and plaster in a sack, which I sealed up there and then, and the whole were immediately forwarded to the laboratory of the Arts-et-Métiers, that they might be there subjected to a legal inspection.

According to this testimony, it appeared that Bodasse's body must have been cut up in the open part of the room, between the centre table and the work-table. I also noticed, in the dark closet on the left-hand side of the alcove and adjoining Monsieur Barta's room, and on its right-hand side, the absence of a large piece of blue wall-paper, of the same kind and size as that lying at the Morgue, and in which a piece of human flesh had been found. In order to arouse Voirbo from the state of utter prostration in which he was plunged, I caused him to approach the closet, and, placing in his hand a candle which I had lit, I asked him to show me a light. But he was now trembling to such an extent that his fingers refused to grip the candlestick I was offering him. In an almost inaudible and imploring voice he exclaimed :

"Don't continue ; I am guilty. I will tell you—you alone—but not here. Take me away quickly out of this accursed place. I feel that I shall fall. I am stifling—air—air ! "

And indeed he was staggering. The young wife quickly filled a glass of wine, which she held out to me. I offered it to Voirbo.

"Drink—that will restore you. We will leave in a moment."

"No, no—not that," he murmured, "it's red—water ! Water ! I beg of you ! "

I acceded to his request, and then asked Madame Bethmont to go downstairs and order the cab to drive up.

"It is needless," said Voirbo. "I feel better now. I can walk to it ; the confession of my crime has relieved me."

As I was getting ready to start, and have the prisoner removed, Widow Pertant said to me :

"You were just now talking about a crime that had been committed at Aubervilliers. Why, Monsieur Voirbo used to have a customer residing there."

"I have never denied it," quickly interrupted Voirbo ;

"Bernard was one of my customers; I knew him through his son-in-law, Victor Saba."

"Then was it not you who made this Bernard a double satchel-shaped cloth pocket, which he was in the habit of fastening to the waistband of his trousers, and in which he kept his money?"

"No, I never made anything of the kind, and was not acquainted with this circumstance."

Madame Bethmont here intervened:

"Mr. Commissary," said she, "in a place like mine one hears much and answers but little; but I ought to draw your attention to a remark made in my presence. I cannot tell you who it was that told me, but at the very time the servant-girl of the Rue Saint-Placide was murdered, Voirbo was keeping company with her. It was even whispered that he had borrowed money from her under promise of marrying her."

"That is false!" exclaimed Bodasse's murderer. "I knew Marie Carton very well; she was in the habit of spending part of her Sundays with one of my work-girls, who is now dead; but I never courted her, nor borrowed money of her. However, I will give you every desirable explanation both regarding her and Bernard."

"We shall see; we can now start," I remarked.

CHAPTER XVII.

ATTEMPT AT ESCAPE.—CONFESSION.

ON quitting Voirbo's former lodging, I left behind me my secretary, who was writing out his report of our visit. The two constables and the prisoner had preceded me by a minute. In the Rue Mazarine, I was able to follow them, with my eyes until they turned the corner of the Place Buci. When they reached the cab, which was waiting in the Rue de Buci, Champy opened the door and, wishing to show his politeness, invited Voirbo to get in first.. The latter did not require to be told a second time, but, instead of taking his seat, he quickly opened the opposite door, jumped out into the roadway and took to his heels. Before his two keepers had recovered from their surprise, he had already got a start of some twenty paces. When I, myself, turned the corner of the Rue de Buci, I could see him alone in the middle of the roadway, running with the rapidity which his age, vigour, and the strength resulting from hope inspired.

Voirbo free! The public thoroughfare open to him! The thought made me shudder. With two bounds, I was on the box, beside the driver, who had rapidly caught up his reins and was preparing to give chase to the prisoner. With a vigorous cut of the whip, he roused his horse which reared and started off at the top of its speed. I, on my part shouted out as loud as I could.

"Stop thief! Murder! Stop him!"

Following my example, and whilst continuing to belabour his horse with might and main, the driver, an Auvergnat, also shouted lustily in drunken tones:

"Murder! Murder! Stop that brigand who is making off!"

Just as the baying of a pack of hounds in close pursuit gives the hunted stag a fresh impetus, so did my Jehu's voice seem to give wings to the fugitive. In the twinkling of an eye the whole street was in a flutter; everybody was shouting and running in four or five different directions.

The first moment of surprise over, Ringué and Champy had started in pursuit of Voirbo, who, more agile than they, was rapidly outstripping them. Our horse now galloping at the top of its speed, seemed as if soon likely either to reach and upset him, or else to pass him. On hearing the rapid and cadenced sound of the animal's hoofs, Voirbo, who had got halfway down the Rue de Seine, in the direction of the quay, abruptly turned to the right and disappeared in the Passage du Pont-Neuf, where the cab could not follow him.

"Go and wait for me at the corner of the Mint," said I to the driver, jumping down from the vehicle without waiting for it to stop.

In his wild course, Voirbo struck his foot against one of the five stone steps of the passage and fell; but his hands clutched at the iron railing, which at this point divides the passage into two, and he regained his feet in a moment to dart off again quicker than ever. Twenty paces farther on he slipped a second time, on one of the polished cast-iron slabs covering the drain which runs under the centre of the passage, and he again fell with his hands stretched before him. He was scarcely down when he bounded up again like an elastic ball, and resumed his wild course with increased speed. After a few strides he came out in the Rue Mazarine, then turned down the Rue Guénégaud, which was facing him, and led straight to the Quai de Conti. He was evidently making for the Seine. Ringué and Champy had taken advantage of his two falls to shorten the distance between them, and he could now hear the thud, thud, of their footsteps close at his heels. The approach of danger increased Voirbo's strength tenfold. Despair and rage added to that of his pursuers. The pace of all three was becoming a dizzy one.

In the Rue Guénégaud, an enormous dog, darting out of No. 29, rushed between Ringué's legs and brought him to the ground. Champy, heedless of his colleague, continued to press the murderer closer and closer. He was almost touching him, and every now and again stretched forth his arm as if to seize him, but with a tremendous bound Voirbo was once more out of reach. As much with a view to lessen the weight he was carrying during the chase, as in anticipa-

tion of a pursuit in the water should Voirbo plunge into it, Champy had thrown off part of his clothing as he ran; one by one he had thus got rid of his cap, overcoat, jacket, and waistcoat, and had, in addition, tightened the belt which held up his trousers. When crossing the roadway of the Quai de Conti, which he had now reached, the fugitive jumped aside to escape an omnibus which was passing; and with another bound he was about to ascend the three steps separating the road from the pavement, running beside the parapet of the quay, but he miscalculated his leap, and for the third time measured his length on the ground, his feet in the gutter, and his head on the edge of the pavement. He was once more struggling to rise, when Champy at last pounced upon him and held him to the ground.

In a moment some twenty persons had surrounded them. Voirbo no longer thought of resistance. His face was covered with blood. Panting and worn out, he was absolutely unable to offer further resistance, and it was without the least show of fight that he allowed himself to be removed to the station-house in the Rue Christine, followed by upwards of five hundred persons shouting and yelling: "Kill him! Duck him, the murderer!" On reaching the police-station it was found necessary to have recourse to the medicine chest to bring him to. At three o'clock he was taken back to my office in a cab. As he had formerly refused to be photographed, and as the possession of his likeness had become a necessity in order to lay hands on him again if, thanks to his audacity and energy, he eventually succeeded in making his escape—for with a criminal of his calibre everything had to be taken into consideration—I had asked my friend Clésinger, the sculptor, to secrete himself in my secretary's room, whence he would be able, unobserved, to see the murderer in my private office and take a portrait of him. In this way, Clésinger was able to make several sketches of the criminal's head.

Before commencing my interrogatory, I addressed a few remarks to Ringué and Champy, with respect to the negligence they had shown. Crest-fallen, like a couple of children who had been caught committing some trifling offence, they dared not look up. I administered some salve, however, by telling them that if they had been guilty of a fault by per-

mitting their prisoner to escape, they had wiped it out by catching him again.

"You see," said I to them, "you should never forget for one single instant that the perpetual aim of every person is liberty. All his attention, all his faculties are unceasingly turned in this direction, and the most trifling negligence on the part of an officer is turned to account. One day, when we have more leisure, I will give you in writing the necessary advice and instructions, in order to prevent, in future, any prisoner escaping from your custody."

Then, addressing Voirbo, I said: "Do you feel able to answer my questions, and shall we examine, together, the articles seized at your residence?"

"I am still very weak," he replied, "but I will summon up the necessary strength to do so. Pray do not postpone this matter any longer. Second thoughts might tempt me to retract the confession I made to you in my old room."

I, thereupon, opened the trunk which had been brought the evening before from the Rue Lamartine, and showed him the contents.

"Behold the result of my search! Nothing is wanting—not even Bodasse's Italian bonds which you had so cleverly submerged in a cask of wine."

"Who on earth gave you the idea of looking for them there?"

"I made the discovery whilst I was ascertaining where the two casks of wine that you had received, to the great astonishment of your doorkeeper, had come from. You asked me for material evidence; I think you must own, by this time, that there is more than enough."

"Yes, I see there is; I will therefore tell you everything; but only on condition that you permit me to write a letter to my wife, which you shall read before sending it off."

"I consent. Seat yourself at this table; there are pens, ink, paper and envelopes."

A few minutes afterwards, Voirbo showed me the letter he had written. It was worded as follows:—

"February 20th, 1869.

"Adélia,—Since yesterday I have lost the power of speech. Do not despair. On Thursday next you shall know

the whole truth. Between now and then take no kind of steps. Your honour requires it. Forgive me the anxieties I am causing you; and wait before you judge.

"Your loving husband,

"PIERRE VOIRBO."

Having read this letter, I placed it in an envelope and told the messenger to take it to its address. Voirbo thanked me, this time in all sincerity.

"I have kept faith with you; it is now your turn to do so with me. Tell me who you really are, for up to the present your personality has been a mystery."

"My real name is not Voirbo, but for the present I shall not tell you what it is—later on we will see. I am an illegitimate child; however, I know my father, and must acknowledge that I am not proud of him. Everybody, including my wife, believes me to be an orphan; but my parents are still in existence. I see my mother occasionally—I help her more or less, for she is poor and old in years, and, besides, the unfortunate woman worships me in spite of all my shortcomings. I likewise love her! My father is a bad man. When I was quite a child he was in the habit of beating me frequently; and as I grew up he continued to do so brutally, and occasionally in his fits of anger he would shake his clenched fist at me saying: '*You—you shall perish by my hand!*' I trust you may never know the precise meaning of those terrible words. In the main my father was right enough; I was indeed a good-for-nothing fellow. *Not wishing to die by his hand,* I tried to kill him; but, doubtless, guessing my thoughts, he kept on his guard. I left the house, anger in my mind, hatred in my heart. Even now I still hate my father, as much as, and even more than formerly because of the sufferings he subjected my poor mother to, and the harsh treatment he inflicted on me in my childhood. Perhaps he is the cause of my misfortunes."

"Does he bear the same name as yourself?"

"He does not. I told you I was a *bastard*—my father never acknowledged me; his only way of testifying to his paternity was by means of blows."

"Then tell me his name, since it is different from yours."

"I cannot do so, for you know him. You must have had something to do with him under very painful circumstances. I will recall him to your memory, but not now."

"What did you do when you left your parents' home?"

"I battled for life, in which everything is either chance or trickery—I did my best, and that unsuccessfully, to make up for bad luck by more or less fair means. I was an obscure personage, and I longed to shine; I was poor, and I worshipped wealth. My marriage with Mademoiselle Rémondé would have given me a modest competency, and, perhaps, with such a good woman as she is, I might have taken to work again and atoned for my faults."

"Say rather your crimes."

"*Crimes;* you are right. Yet, I sometimes forget that I am a criminal, and like a great many scoundrels I was anxious to settle down and become an honest man. Some manage to succeed, I am acquainted with such men—as for me, I have failed. If that selfish old man, Désiré, had lent me the ten thousand francs I begged him to advance me I would never have killed him. I had told the Rémondés that I possessed that amount—so I had to produce it; my marriage was at that price. I begged and implored Bodasse, but nothing could move him; on the contrary he laughed at me, laughed at my matrimonial projects, and at every argument I brought forward; then—well I murdered him."

"At your own lodging?"

"As you have proved."

"How did you manage to entice him to your room?"

"On Monday, the 14th of December, after leaving the baths and dining together at the restaurant in the Rue Grégoire-de-Tours, I invited him to take a cup of tea at my place. He followed me without the least mistrust—besides, he was often in the habit of coming to my room, not, let me tell you, because he wanted to see me, but in the hope of meeting some of my work-girls. On the night in question, I told him that my betrothed was going to spend the evening there, with a relative, and, in order to make him believe all the more that I had company, I left him for a few minutes while at the restaurant, and went and lit some candles in my room. I had also thrown open the shutters so that he might see the light from the street. My deter-

mination had been taken. No sooner was he in the room, when he asked me, as he sat down by the side of the table, why I had hoaxed him, since there was nobody there? I replied that my betrothed was coming. Then passing behind him, and without his noticing it, I seized one of the flat irons standing on my work-table—that's the one, there—and without any argument—without saying a word, I dealt him, unawares, a terrific blow on the skull. Not a sound escaped him. His head sank on to the table, his arms hung down inert. I was astonished, and satisfied with my strength and skill.

"Then, blowing out the light, I opened the window and pulled the shutters to. In silence and darkness I listened to discover if he stirred. But I heard nothing—except his blood which fell on the floor, drop by drop! This monotonous drop—drop—drop—made my flesh creep. Still I kept on listening, listening. All on a sudden I heard a deep sigh, and something like a creaking of the chair. Désiré was moving—he was not dead! Suppose he were to cry out. This thought restored all my presence of mind to me. Lighting a small lamp, I saw that the body had moved sideways, he was then still living. He was certainly no longer in a condition to make himself heard—to call for help; but his death-agony might be spun out—and I did not want to see him suffer a long while. I, therefore, took a razor, approached him from behind and placed my hand under the chin of my ex-friend. Yielding to my pressure, the head rose up and then fell backwards. The lamp was shining full on his blood-smeared face; his round eyes were not yet lifeless—for a moment they fastened on the blade of the razor I was holding open above him, and suddenly assumed such an expression of terror, that my heart beat violently. It was necessary to put an end to it. The same as a barber does when about to shave a customer, I pressed the blade just below the Adam's apple, where the beard commences, and with a vigorous sweep I drew the blade from left to right. It entirely disappeared in the flesh—the head fell lifeless on the back of the chair. My first gash had severed the carotid artery and the larynx. A death rattle, and his last breath issued from the wound I had made. A rush of blood spurted out, and fell in part on a

sugar-basin, which had been left uncovered on the table.

"I now let the body slide gently to the floor, and, fearing lest I might be seen through the openings in the shutters and the muslin curtains, I fastened a thick blanket before the window, which, in my hurry to draw the shutters to, I had forgotten to close. Returning to Bodasse's body, I examined it for a moment, and saw that death had done its work! So as not to stain my clothes, I took everything off with the exception of a pair of drawers and my socks, then, taking a sponge and wash-hand basin, I commenced by wiping up the blood which had fallen in almost every direction. I threw the discoloured sugar in the stove. Then laying the corpse on a board, I wholly undressed the upper part, cutting the clothes away with my scissors. The lower portion of the trousers, which I had separated some little distance above the knee, I threw back over the legs. They were in my way, those two legs which became the starting-point of your inquiry. I therefore detached them from the thighs, hacking them off by means of that butcher's chopper you found at my residence. But I did not chop like a butcher would when cutting up a quarter of beef—I pressed the sharp edge on the flesh, and then struck the back of the chopper with the metal bobbin you have there—it does not make the least noise.

"The legs now being off, I put them in the trunk I kept in the little closet—oh, how heavy they were! Although the man was but small in stature, and in spite of the absence of the legs, Désiré struck me as still being much too big. I commenced cutting up the body altogether—but the head, already half severed from the trunk, would not keep still. Every time the least motion was given to the bust it moved, swaying either to the right or to the left, and splashed my face with drops of blood.

"It was horrible! So I severed it completely from the body, and contemplated it for a moment as I held it in both hands—I can see it—see it still. What a terrible *tête-à-tête!* On ceasing my inspection I placed it in a pan, with the face downwards, so that I might no longer see it.

"I then cut off the arms, and completely flayed the bust. I thought that, once freed from the outer skin, the flesh

after a longer or shorter stay in the water, would be ure to be taken for the remains of some animal. And, in truth, it certainly did look like so much butcher's meat. After having opened the belly with a knife, the handle of which broke off during the operation, I removed the entrails, liver, lungs and heart to the water-closet close to the door of my room. In order to dispose of the body more easily, I cut it up into small pieces, which I then packed in the same trunk as the legs. There being no doorkeeper to the house I was enabled, without disturbing anyone, to get an unlimited supply of water, at the foot of the stairs, to scrub the room out with. What a quantity of blood there is in a human body !—I thought I should never see the end of it. Oh ! what a terrible winter's night I passed ! I was red with perspiration yet I shivered with cold, my weary fingers were no longer able to handle the scissors I used for cutting."

"What did you do with Bodasse's clothes ?"

"I burnt them in the stove, with my own, as well as the chair and board which were wet with blood. During the remainder of that night, as well as the whole of Tuesday, I never stirred from my room, but on the following night I carried the pieces of flesh out of the house and scattered them everywhere. I had soon only the legs left. Fearing lest they might be recognised, I had decided to drop them down the well of the house in the Rue Princesse. Having formerly visited a girl, named Gaupe, there, I was aware of the existence of the well, and knew also the secret of gaining admission to the premises. On the night of the 21st of December, after having tied these two limbs in wrappers that I was in the habit of using, and having pasted railway labels on them with the intention of showing, if I were surprised, that I had just come back from a journey, I went out, towards one in the morning, bearing my funeral burden which was carefully tied up.

"By way of extra precaution, and to make anyone I might meet believe that I was a belated traveller, I threw a rug over my shoulder and carried a basket, in which I placed various articles which I had shortly before received from Langres. I was going along full of anxiety, when all on a sudden police-constables Ringué and Champy barred my way at the Carrefour de Buci. Knowing the rotation

of their duty and the usual rounds of the force, I was certain that, at such an hour, I ought not to meet a single policeman on my way. Therefore I stood speechless on finding myself face to face with them. Never in the whole course of my life have I experienced such fear. But recovering, fortunately, my self-possession I was able to deceive them, and continue on my road.

"The very first time I called here I recognised those two officers, and, as you rightly guessed, I did my best to avoid meeting them again. This encounter in the Carrefour de Buci had perplexed me, and, whilst going in the direction of the Rue Princesse, I asked myself whether it would not be better to alter my plans and to throw the remains I was carrying into the Seine. Before entering the street, I again hesitated; but my evil genius urged me onward. I entered my former work-girl's dwelling without making the least noise; and, once in the yard, I was careful to see that no lights were burning in the windows. I removed the cover from the well and slipped my lugubrious bundle down it by means of a string I had rolled round it, and which gradually unwound; it disappeared in the water without the least noise. After having again made sure that nobody was watching me, I regained the street, and quietly returned to the Rue Mazarine, by way of the Carrefour de Buci, feeling sure I should not meet the same constables there. On getting back to my room, I looked in my glass and grew frightened at my own pallor. My interview with those two constables had curdled the blood in my veins. I was trembling with cold and yet in a perspiration, as at the time when I was cutting up Désiré's body. But the thought of the old man's ten thousand francs, and of my betrothed gave me fresh courage. I went to bed and fell asleep as I thought of them. That, Mr. Commissary, is the true account of my crime."

"But what became of the head? You have not told me that."

"The head is safe enough. You will probably never find it, even if I tell you what I did with it. Had I only done the same with those confounded legs, I should now be quietly seated at the fireside, with my wife."

"Tell me, though, what you did do with the head?"

"As it was the part which could most easily be recognised, I poured lead into it by the ears and mouth. At two o'clock in the morning I threw it into the middle of the Seine, from the top of the Pont de la Concorde. You may be quite sure that it will never rise to the surface. I melted the lead by means of that zinc worker's mould you have in your possession, and which a customer forgot at my place one day."

"That customer was probably a criminal of some kind or other?"

"If you like."

"An accomplice, may be?"

"No, I alone conceived, prepared and executed the project of Bodasse's murder."

"But was your victim's death an absolute necessity?"

"Yes, since I was in want of ten thousand francs, and Désiré happened to possess that amount."

"You might have stolen it from him—that would have been bad enough; but after all, it would not have been a murder."

"No matter who might have stolen his hoard, he would always have suspected me."

"You are scarcely thirty years of age, and your life is already terribly burdened with crime."

"True enough—but I was determined to make myself a position at all costs. To effect this, I played against society at large a bold game, of which my head was the stake. I have made every effort to save it and in spite of all my energy the game is lost, and quite lost this time."

"But this energy you are referring to is a monstrous one. You possess, in the very highest degree, a contempt for human life, and you have always made away with your fellow-creatures in a cowardly fashion. Marie Carton, the servant girl of the Rue Saint-Placide, and the farmer Bernard, have also been your victims."

"As to these last two persons we will talk of them later on—with the examining magistrate, just now you have no authority to go into these cases."

"You are mistaken.. Victor Saba's papers, found at your lodging, give me the right to question you on the subject.

It must have been through Bernard that you got hold of the documents found in your bag."

"My bag—my bag—I ought to have been off much sooner; I ought never to have got married. That marriage has been my ruin. My wife does not love me; hence she would not have regretted my departure. I ought to have sloped when I noticed that you were having me watched by Entouca and Gloria, and not have given the storm time enough to break over me; I ought to have left the country as soon as I found things getting too warm. I have waited much too long—at this moment I ought to have been in New York, with Helen Ball, my first wife; for I may as well tell you now, I am a bigamist."

"What has become of your first wife?"

"She was arrested with a gang of foreign thieves to which she belonged, and has only just come out of prison. Helen Ball is an accomplished pick-pocket."

"You are evidently acquainted with that gang of burglars who possess certain special housebreaking implements manufactured abroad. Does not that bobbin-shaped hammer you made use of when dismembering Bodasse come from them?"

"Yes, it was their leader who presented me with that instrument, or, I should say rather, that he gave it me as a wedding present, for Helen Ball is his daughter. It was whilst associating with the father, that I got to know and love the girl, and that more for her faults than her good qualities, and I could only have her by marrying her."

"But why, then, did you leave the girl since you loved her?"

"Because she used to spend half her time in prison, under assumed names. I was afraid of becoming one day compromised with her and by her. I detest solitude; and it was during her last imprisonment that I hit upon the unlucky idea of marrying again."

"Since the 13th of February, when I first became acquainted with you, and began to follow you step by step, I have tried in vain to discover the honest side of your character. You, yourself, have confessed that you murdered Bodasse, so as to enable you to wed Mademoiselle Adélia Rémondé. But you have not even the excuse of a great

blinding passion, for in your secret heart you do not even love your second wife. On the contrary, it is a foreigner, a thief, a criminal who possesses all your affection."

"That is true enough! Adélia's uprightness inspires me with dread. And as for regrets, I have only one, that of having been clumsy enough to allow myself to have been caught."

"And that Mademoiselle Aline, who writes to you from Langres? She seems to have a certain attachment for you."

"She used to be very fond of me. She is married to a worthy country journeyman, and is quite ignorant of my misdeeds; there is really no necessity to mix her up with my deplorable business. It would only ruin her in her husband's esteem."

"Yet you have seen her lately?"

"Yes, she came to Paris a few days after the death of Désiré, whom she was well acquainted with; and she gave me the small pocket-knife you found in my possession, for him."

"It will be absolutely necessary to hear her on the subject."

"Pray don't! Like all men who are brought face to face with human misery, you are, no doubt, good-natured—Don't ruin that young woman—I swear to you that she has had nothing to do with my affairs!"

"I am quite prepared to believe you, and I do so; but directly after her marriage she ought to have dropped all intercourse with you and Désiré. Even were I so disposed, I am no longer in a position to discard her testimony. Her christian-name, written in chalk by herself on Bodasse's door, appears in the official report of our first visit to your victim's room. The labels of the Eastern Railway, bearing the name of the town of Langres, which you pasted on the bundle containing the legs, are also among the papers bearing on the inquiry."

"I will explain the matter to the magistrate, and I hope he will take into consideration, in Aline's favour, the few political services I have rendered the government. I am, besides, of opinion that the Prefecture of Police will not be wanting in gratitude towards me, and that the scaffold will never be erected on my account."

"You are labouring under a delusion."

"Come—look at me well—have I a gallows face? No, no; my head will never fall beneath the executioner's knife!"

"As to that I can say nothing. Your fate is in the hands of the jury."

"That remains to be seen."

"But to return to the details of your crime. Was it you who used to go to the Rue Dauphine, to light the candles and wind up the clock in Bodasse's room?"

"Yes, for on the opposite side of the little yard, and facing Désiré's windows, there is a room inhabited by two young women. From where they were, they were in a position to see the light and the moving pendulum of the cuckoo-clock. I only discontinued my nocturnal visits to the old man's lodging on the day when meeting, in the Rue Dauphine, one of the police agents set to watch, I suspected the trap you had set for me."

"Was Bodasse in the habit of carrying his securities about with him?"

"No. I found them in his bureau, in a secret drawer."

"How did you find out the working of it?"

"It was one day, whilst with Désiré's aunt, that I saw her opening, in my presence, the drawer of a piece of furniture similar to my friend's, I fancied that the construction of the two bureaux was the same, and I was not mistaken."

"When did you take possession of his securities?"

"On the day after the crime—at seven in the evening."

"How did you manage to get into Bodasse's room?"

"By means of his keys, which I had found on his person; and that enabled me to bring back his cane, hat and watch, and to commit the robbery at the same time."

"Talking of keys, I have seen none in your possession. And yet your bag and the casket which had contained your wife's fortune, were locked."

"My keys are in a hat-box, left for a while at a second-hand dealer's, in the Rue de l'Echaudé; the same to whom I sold my old furniture."

"I will write to the examining magistrate, in order to acquaint him with your confession. After that I shall

draw up the official report of your statements and you can sign it with me."

"My confession must suffice—I will sign nothing."

"Then there is no use in keeping you any longer at the police-station of the Place Saint-Sulpice. I shall send you to the Depôt, in virtue of the warrant I have against you; and as I am responsible for your person until you are properly entered there, I shall accompany you and the constables who have charge of you."

"Pray, don't be afraid—I shall not attempt another escape; I have tried once and failed."

"All the same, you are a man one cannot take too many precautions with."

Then turning to my secretary, I dictated to him, purposely in Voirbo's presence, the following document:

"Sunday, February 28th, 1869.

"ORDER OF COMMITMENT.

"We, Commissary of Police of the Odéon District,

"Commit to the Depôt, attached to the Prefecture of Police, in virtue of the accompanying warrant of arrest, issued by Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, examining magistrate, the person named or styling himself:

"Pierre Voirbo, *alias* Victor Saba, place of birth unknown, thirty years of age, a tailor by profession, and residing at No. 26, Rue Lamartine.

"Accused of several murders, accompanied by theft.

"Voirbo is a dangerous criminal, energetic and determined. He has already tried to effect his escape; he might renew this attempt, or commit suicide.

"*To be very closely watched.*

"The Governor of the Depôt is requested to prevent all communication with the outer world, until the examining magistrate orders him to be placed in close confinement.

"G. MACÉ,

"Commissary of Police."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE CESSPOOL.—VOIRBO BEFORE THE EXAMINING MAGISTRATE.

ON acknowledging the receipt of my letter announcing Voirbo's confession, Monsieur Douet d'Arcq sent me an order to have the cesspool of the house where Bodasse had been murdered emptied. The examining magistrate had reserved to himself the duty of determining the opportune moment for this operation. After reading Voirbo's confession, he no longer saw any necessity for postponing it, and he recommended it should be proceeded with at once in my presence, and with the utmost care.

On the following day, therefore, Monday, the 1st of March, a body of men belonging to the Richer Company arrived in the Rue Mazarine, at ten o'clock at night, and set to work. Two hours later, the operation was at an end. In the midst of *excretæ* there had been found the waistband of the iron-grey corded trousers, which Désiré was wearing on the day of his disappearance; the upper portion of a woman's stocking marked + B +, some pieces of burnt bone, and a portion of the entrails, bits of the stomach where it joins the œsophagus; the heart, liver, spleen, colon, and bladder. These human remains, forming a considerable bulk, were in a perfect state of preservation, thanks to the ammonia existing in the cesspool. I placed everything in sealed jars, and on the following day I had these taken to the Morgue. My messenger was handed, in return, a receipt which I appended to my report giving an account of the result of the emptying of the cesspool.

Ringué went, day after day, to the Beaudelocqs, Bodasse's former doorkeepers; but their reply was always the same: "Nothing fresh here!" The second-hand dealer of the Rue de l'Echaudé, who had purchased Voirbo's old furniture, had indeed a tall hat in its box, which he had been asked to take care of. Besides the keys, which the murderer

had told me of, the hat and box contained nothing suspicious.

"With the exception of a chest of drawers, which contains nothing whatever," the second-hand dealer said to me, "I have already sold all Voirbo's furniture, since his arrest has got wind. On account of the things having belonged to him, I have been paid fifty per cent. more for them than they were worth. It is sad to say, but the souvenirs of murderers are as eagerly sought after as the relics of saints. Consequently I need not tell you, I was uncommonly sorry that Voirbo refused to sell me a big black trunk—and yet I offered him five francs for it."

He had burnt this trunk which had contained his victim's remains because it retained a cadaveric smell.

On the morning of the 2nd of March, I received a letter from Widow Bodasse, informing me of her pending arrival in Paris, for the purpose of taking possession of her husband's estate. That same day, at noon, Voirbo appeared for the second time before the examining magistrate Monsieur Douet d'Arcq, to whom I had just brought the remaining documents bearing on the case. The magistrate then proceeded to examine the accused.

"I perceive you have commenced making a confession; that was the best thing you could have done. I presume you intend to confirm the statements you have made to the Commissary of Police. The investigation of your case will thus proceed all the more rapidly."

"All I have said," replied Voirbo, "is the truth."

"There are still a few obscure points which require clearing up. To begin with, we must establish your identity and antecedents; we can then go into the matter of Bodasse's murder, after which, I will question you with respect to the farmer, Bernard, and the servant girl, Marie Carton."

"I will answer all your questions; but I beg you will postpone my examination to another day. The three tumbles I had on Sunday last, in trying to effect my escape, have left behind a general shock to the brain which causes me much suffering. My ideas are not over clear—I seem to have a sort of void in my head. Send me to Mazas, and I promise you on Saturday next a pre-

cise statement as to my birth and family. You shall learn from notes, I will supply, what was the nature of my connection with the farmer, Bernard, and the servant girl Marie Carton. You shall have a full confession concerning all the accusations hanging over me, and on this occasion I will place my real name at the foot of my statements."

"Which means to say, I suppose," interrupted the examining magistrate, "that you intend to refuse to sign the declaration and promise you have just made?"

"I shall never sign any of your official reports—I have solemnly sworn at various public meetings never to append my name to any legal document. It is with me a question of principle. I always know and remember what I have written; but I can never remember, even after having read it, what you may dictate to your clerk."

"Have you not some secret motive in asking me to put off your third appearance here till Saturday next? You are trying to gain time—with what object?"

Voirbo looked down, without replying.

"I shall order your removal to Mazas, but I warn you, that you will be kept in absolute close confinement until the fulfilment of your promises."

"You may remove him," added the magistrate addressing Ringué and Champy.

The prisoner rose. Each of the constables took hold of one of his arms. On going out, the murderer turned towards the examining magistrate and myself, muttering:

"Farewell, gentlemen, until Saturday next."

A pale ironic smile contracted his lips, when he had ceased speaking. It was the last time I saw him.

CHAPTER XIX.

VOIRBO'S SUICIDE.—HIS BURIAL.—HIS FAMILY.

At eleven o'clock in the morning on Thursday, the 4th of March, Mid-Lent, I was working in my private room. Champy entered to inform me that a lady, dressed in mourning and closely veiled, wished to speak to me, but refused to give her name. I told him to admit this person, and a moment afterwards Madame Voirbo came in. I pointed to a chair. Automaton-like she sank into it, and raised her veil. She had aged some twenty years within so many days. Pale, hollow-eyed, with drawn features and wrinkled brows, her hair streaked with many a silver thread, she seemed at least forty-five years old and, yet, was not even twenty-five.

"When executing on my premises a terrible duty," she observed, "you showed yourself so compassionate towards my misfortune, that I have not hesitated to call and ask you to do me a service."

"I am entirely at your disposal, madame—Speak, I beg. What is it you wish?"

"I have neither courage, nor strength enough for fulfilling the formalities connected with my hus—I mean Monsieur Voirbo's funeral."

"Voirbo's funeral!—Do you mean to say he is dead?"

"Were you not aware of it?"

"Not in the least. And it is highly probable that I should not have heard of it for some days to come, had you not called and acquainted me with the circumstance. But, when and how did he die?"

"I know nothing as to the details. This is all the notice I have had on the subject."

I took the unfolded letter, Madame Voirbo held out to me, and read:—

"Thursday, March 4th, 1869.—The Governor of Mazas prison requests Madame Voirbo, No. 26, Rue Lamartine

to be good enough to come and identify the body of her husband, Pierre Voirbo, deceased in this House of Detention, and forthwith to make the necessary arrangements for his burial, failing which, the matter will be proceeded with by the authorities.

"The Governor (signature illegible)."

I was stupefied. This unexpected death amazed me considerably.

"I will do everything necessary for you," said I to Madame Voirbo. "Only, I shall require your marriage certificate. I have already asked you to forward it to me."

"Here it is."

"I will have the certificate of death made out, and constables Ringué and Champy, who have known Voirbo, will act as witnesses in case of need. It is useless to ask you, is it not, what kind of funeral he is to have?"

"Monsieur Voirbo was a free-thinker; he must be buried without religious rites. God will be his judge."

"You are desirous, I presume, that as little as possible shall be said about his death?"

"I desire that his fatal name shall sink into oblivion."

"Are you acquainted with his parents' address?"

"Like myself, he was an orphan as to father, as to mother."

"You are mistaken. He confessed to me that, although a natural child, he knew his parents, and that he occasionally saw his mother, for whom he seemed to entertain a certain affection. Such was not the case, however, as regards his father—according to him the latter was a wretch whom he would have liked to murder."

"Unhappy man! He always lied to me He used to speak to me about his dead mother with his eyes full of tears. Such filial affection affected me deeply. Otherwise I would never have consented to become his wife."

"He likewise informed me that Voirbo was not his real name. He married under false conditions, so that legally you are not his wife, since, on his own showing, there was an inaccuracy as to his identity."

"If I am not his wife legally, I am even less so in fact."

"Is it possible? And yet you have lived together during two whole months."

"That is quite true, but my intercourse with him has only been that of a sick-nurse. From the first day of my sham marriage I have continually tended the man who was my husband in name only."

"I will now go to the prison, and if you will be here about seven o'clock this evening, I may be in a position to give you a few particulars respecting Voirbo's death."

"I will do so, sir—till this evening then."

As soon as the young widow had gone, I entered a cab in company of Ringué and Champy, and told the cabman to drive us to Mazas. On the way, the two constables who, up to that time, had shown much gaiety and high spirits, had become dejected, anxious and thoughtful. This was because, with the death of the murderer, they lost for ever the prospect of further investigations to be made in connection with the other two murders, of which Voirbo appeared to have been the author. They would therefore be obliged to give up inquiries in which they took a certain pleasure, to bid farewell to the unforeseen emotions which accompany the pursuits of criminals, and to resume the monotonous life of squads A, B, C, the mechanical and uninteresting vocation of which Champy was but too well acquainted with. On seeing me enter the prison, the governor came up to me with outstretched hand, saying:

"My dear commissary, your man was dead almost before entering the waiting-room. At eight o'clock this morning, on alighting from the prison van which brought him from the Depôt, he was placed in company with other prisoners in the waiting-room, whence it is customary for them to pass one by one into the registrar's office in order to go through certain prison formalities. No sooner was he in this room, than he broke in two the loaf that he was carrying under his arm, pulled out a razor-blade and cut his throat, without a moment's hesitation, in the presence of some dozen fellow-prisoners. He fell heavily to the ground, and the medical officer, who was just then going on his daily rounds and who was sent for immediately, could do no more than certify his death."

"So Voirbo cannot have been minutely searched on leaving the Depôt?"

"Who would ever have thought of examining the inside

of his loaf? Of course you know, as well as I do, that the man who leaves prison is not searched in the same way as a man who enters it. What astonishes me is that he can have entered the Depôt with a razor-blade about him."

"He most decidedly had none, when I had him committed. You must own, my dear governor, that a prisoner of Voirbo's importance deserved a little more attention. It is for the sake of clinging everlastingly to the beaten track, and from trying to save the expense of a couple of francs, in the shape of a cab fare, that the authorities remove all prisoners, without distinction, in the van; hence the frequency of escapes. And mark you, that for every prisoner who gets away, a hundred times more is spent than a cab fare; besides which we may think ourselves very lucky if we ever again succeed in laying hands on him."

"I presume the suicide's widow, will be here directly?"

"By no means. I am here to act for her. Madame Voirbo, who deserves as much respect as her husband inspires horror, objects to appear in any way. She will confine herself to paying any expenses that may be incurred. I have brought with me a couple of constables who were acquainted with this man; they will serve as witnesses for the certificate of death. Here is the marriage certificate which will be sufficient to establish his identity, although Voirbo told me that he was married under a false name. This man must have had some criminal antecedents. However, he is dead now, and owes nothing more to society. Let me know at what time the funeral will take place."

"I shall not fail to do so."

From Mazas I went to the Depôt. I was very anxious to discover under what circumstances Voirbo could have got possession of a razor-blade. It was in vain that I asked for an interview with the heads of the Depôt. Both governor and clerks, I was told, were very busy and could not receive me. This had evidently been agreed upon. I addressed myself now to the chief-warder, he pretended to know nothing about Voirbo's suicide, and I could get no kind of information from him. This official was evidently acting under orders, and I could not be angry with him in consequence. I called on the examining magistrate, and found him nervous and irritable, pacing hurriedly to and

fro in his room. He had only just been informed of the prisoner's suicide.

"What do you think of this suicide?" Monsieur Douet d'Arcq asked me after some preliminary explanations.

"I cannot tell you what I think of it. I can only mention that my forebodings have been realised. On the 27th of January last, when you were good enough to entrust me with this case, I told you that I hoped to discover the murderer; and I added that, in my opinion, the affair would end in some unforeseen event, and would never go to the Assizes. I did not think at the time that I should turn out so good a prophet."

"But I should like to know," replied the magistrate, "how the murderer could have obtained possession of a razor?"

"The one he had hidden in the lining of his hat when I arrested him, is sealed up and at your disposal. His clothes were examined after his capture with the most scrupulous care. He could not, therefore, have got possession of this razor, either in your room, or in his former home, the only places to which I took him. With these reservations I leave the way clear for every other hypothesis."

"I shall ask the Prefect of Police for further explanations. Light must be shed on this incident; otherwise there will no longer be any guarantee for justice." After a moment's reflection Monsieur Douet d'Arcq added: "As we have no accomplices to look after in Bodasse's case, all we can do is to pigeon-hole the various documents bearing upon it."

"They will join those relating to the cases of the farmer, Bernard, and the maidservant, Marie Carton," said I.

Anxious to account for the way in which Voirbo had obtained the razor, I called, on leaving the examining magistrate, on my former chief Monsieur Nusse. He received me very kindly; congratulated me on the way in which I had conducted the case, "Bodasse—Voirbo," and finished his homily by expressing his regrets at the murderer's self-inflicted death, adding, that he must have been searched most carelessly at the time of his admittance to the Depôt.

"Say at once that it was I who left a razor in his pocket," I replied.

"Far be such a thought from me. My formal conviction is that the fault lies with the staff at the Depôt. Besides, the Prefect is going to order an inquiry, and the guilty person will certainly be discovered."

"I know the value of official inquiries. Everybody will be questioned, except the very man likely to be able to give information, and, without any more fuss, the whole responsibility will be shifted on my shoulders."

"Do not run away with any such ideas. You will see that the warder at the Depôt, who has been guilty of this neglect, will be discovered and severely punished."

"Yes, some unlucky fellow with a salary of some twelve hundred francs will serve as scapegoat. A week's pay will be stopped, and, in consequence, his wife and children will have to go without food. A fine act of retributive justice to be sure. What would you do, if I were to discover the official who, abusing his office and power, was instrumental in forwarding this razor to Voirbo?"

"If he were under my authority, I would have him dismissed."

"That would be only justice."

At five o'clock, Ringué and Champy were back again. The declaration of death had been duly made at the Mairie of the XIIth Arrondissement, and the time for the funeral fixed for eight o'clock, on the following morning. Punctual to her appointment, Madame Voirbo returned at seven o'clock. I informed her of the formalities that had been gone through, and asked her if she felt desirous of following the funeral in a cab.

"No," said she. "To-morrow morning I shall go to the church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, my former parish, and I shall pray for the mercy of God in favour of this great criminal. Then, I shall relate all the circumstances to the reverend mother of the convent where I was educated, and I shall ask her for a home for the remainder of my days—the poor shall have the benefit of the little that is left me."

"You have made up your mind then to devote yourself wholly to God?"

"To God and those who suffer."

Whilst approving this resolution, I thought it my duty to instil some little hope in this crushed heart. "After a sojourn there of some months, you might return to the world; being young yet, you would find——"

She interrupted me with a gesture. "My life is a blighted one. In the eyes of the world I shall always be the widow of Voirbo, the murderer! The only resource left me is the convent—an unknown and obscure existence—a nameless death, and the consoling thought of rejoining my mother in heaven." The young woman rose to depart, then on second thoughts she asked me:—"By-the-by, you have not told me how the man, whose name I dare not utter, met with his end."

"I regret to have to tell you, madame, that he cut his throat with a razor-blade."

"With a razor-blade, say you?"

"Yes, madame; and I am still wondering how he could have procured it."

Madame Voirbo's face clouded, her head drooped and after a moment's silence she continued: "This suicide is for me a deliverance and a blessing. It is perhaps the only honest action that wretched man ever performed—but I cannot help asking you a question: It was then very necessary that he should commit suicide?"

"So far as I am concerned, madame, I was anxious only to bring him to the Assizes."

"Then I can make nothing out of what has occurred?"

"Explain yourself, please."

"Yesterday morning, at seven o'clock, a man called on me from you——"

"From me? I sent no one!"

"Then the matter becomes more and more complicated."

"For heaven's sake tell me all! If some infamous trick has been played, I should like, above all, to clear my responsibility."

"Your messenger—or at all events the man who gave himself out as such, asked me on your part, for that small case of English razors, *which*, he stated, *would be found in the bag*. It was there. As I had seen you carefully examine them, and even try to fit one of the blades in the

handle, I thought you had forgotten to take possession of the case. Hence I gave it to the gentleman."

"There was some odious trickery at work, which I will report this very evening to the Prefect of Police, and to the Chief of the City Police, who, I feel sure, know nothing whatever about the circumstance. I am acquainted with both of them. They are men of honour. But this, madame, shall not prevent me from endeavouring to discover the individual who assumed my name and used it so unworthily. My secretary and I were the only persons acquainted with the existence of this box of razors, and the place where it was kept. But now I think of it, Voirbo also knew, and he may have communicated with——"

A name crossed my mind, but out of respect to the authorities I did not mention it in presence of the widow. My indignation, however, burst forth when the door of my private room was closed behind her. So my name and office, had been used to supply a criminal with the means of escaping the just and public expiation of his crimes. The political services he may have rendered had been paid for by means of a razor-blade—who knows? This dangerous, compromising man may have been dreaded, and the facility of committing suicide have been given him in order to avoid any disclosures and confessions in the Court of Assizes. Dolt that I was! I had dared to suspect a political spy! I had pushed my pretensions so far as to arrest him, I had been presumptuous enough to intend to bring him face to face with a jury, under a charge of treble murder. Nonsense!—that watchful, ever active secret power was there!—of course there would be a great to do, at head quarters—there would be no end of inquiry—the unfortunate warder, who never thought of breaking Voirbo's loaf, would even, perhaps, be dismissed, but the high-placed official who in spite of the instructions to keep a close watch was able to communicate with the murderer and slip into his hands the weapon which was meant to free him from life, he will be left unscathed—no one will even dare to utter his name.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, I called on the Chief of the City Police. After having carefully listened to my statement, my former principal said to me, in his usual familiar way:

"You know of course, Macé, that I am greatly interested in you—I used to be your father's friend and colleague, and I am proud to call myself yours also. In the name then of this friendship, drop the whole thing; it is a matter which concerns the very highest authorities and not you, take my word for it."

"But the Public Prosecutor and the examining magistrate will require explanations."

"What if they do? They shall have them. Meanwhile, however, I shall make an active search for the person who called on Madame Voirbo in your name. Should he happen to be an employé, and I succeed in finding him, I promise you his punishment will be an exemplary one. Once more, don't forget what I say: let others go into this, and do not interfere further in the matter."

Wishing to see the very last of this sinister cut-throat, I found myself, on Friday, the 5th of March, at eight o'clock in the morning hidden in a cab, at some distance from Mazas prison. Ringué and Champy were also waiting near at hand for the hearse with the intention of following it. Their instructions were to keep separate and at some distance from each other, and to observe and follow, if necessary, anyone who appeared interested in the funeral. I had some idea that the individual who had asked Madame Voirbo for the case of razors, would either follow the hearse or come to the cemetery; and, in spite of my instructions to the contrary, I should very much have liked to become acquainted with him.

At five minutes past eight, the heavy massive gateway of the Mazas prison, turned on its hinges, and gave egress to a hearse which was followed by no one. It was indeed the murderer's funeral going in the direction of the Père-Lachaise cemetery, where, at that time, criminal burials took place in a common grave. It was advancing at a walking pace, but the walking pace of pauper hearses which are followed by no one. All the passers-by turned round with sorrowful looks, on seeing this corpse going thus alone to its last home; women and children made the sign of the cross; men respectfully raised their hats. My conveyance had followed at a considerable distance, in order that it might not be noticed. No kind of incident occurred

during the journey, nor even at the edge of the grave; but hardly had the last shovelful of earth been thrown on the coffin, when two individuals, a man and a woman, appearing to have come from the rising ground of the cemetery, stopped before the grave, one after the other. They examined the spot, and then moved towards the gateway. They had not spoken in passing by the grave, but judging from the looks they cast on each other, and from the expression of their faces, I gathered that they were acquainted, and that Voirbo was no stranger to them.

On rejoining Ringué and Champy, I pointed these two persons out to them with instructions to follow them whereever they might go. I took the precaution of seeing my men at a distance. The two mysterious individuals joined each other, and silently came down the Rue de la Roquette. On passing by the convict depôt, commonly called the Grande Roquette, the man stopped before the five stones on which the scaffold is erected, and pointed out the fatal spot to his companion, who started with a movement of involuntary terror. To me, the man's pantomime meant as much as: "His head would have fallen there!" On the Place de la Bastille, both entered the omnibus going to Grenelle. Nimble as squirrels, Ringué and Champy got on to the top at the same time.

"Whom are we to follow now, governor?" asked my driver.

"The omnibus."

"So much the better, following an omnibus just suits my Reinette; that's my mare, you know. Says she to herself.—'The 'bus doesn't go too fast, just enough for a trot'—she doesn't like walking, she doesn't."

At a sign from her master, the mare went off at an easy trot, keeping pace with the omnibus, without, however, getting up too close, slackening whenever it stopped to take or set down passengers. At the station in the Place Cambronne, the two strangers got out and entered the Rue Croix-Nivert. Faithful to their instructions, my two constables followed them, the one behind the other. Thinking that these mysterious individuals were getting to their journey's end, I quitted my conveyance and took the place of Ringué, who was leading. At a sign I made them, Champy took up his position about fifty yards behind me,

and Ringué, keeping the same distance between himself and his colleague, brought up the rear.

On reaching the Rue du Théâtre, the two individuals entered a house, with a small detached building at the end of the garden. Taking a key from her pocket, the woman opened the door of this dwelling, and was the first to enter. The man followed her. I had hurried up and entered the place almost at the same time they did. With a motion of the hand I had signalled to my men to remain outside.

"What do you want?" asked the man, taking my measure with no kindly look.

"I wish to speak with you," I replied. "I am the Commissary of Police of the Odéon District."

This man and woman looked at one another, stupefied and cast down.

"Our precautions have been useless," muttered the woman.

"Be easy, madame, it is no longer my business to clear up the mystery surrounding the criminal who committed suicide, and to whom you have just bid the last farewell. Justice finished her duty at the brink of the grave. I see you come from the cemetery; your eyes are yet red with tears—I am not mistaken—Voirbo was your son."

"Alas, sir! he was."

"When and how did you hear of his arrest and suicide?"

"Last Monday I received a visit from a messenger of the Prefecture of Police. He came to inform me that my unhappy son had been arrested on political grounds, and that he had passed under the assumed name of Voirbo. Last evening the same man returned, telling me the real cause of my son's arrest, and mentioning his suicide at the same time. He told me the time and place of the funeral."

"And did you not see that same man in the cemetery?"

"I fancy I did. As soon as the cemetery gates were opened this morning, my *gentleman* and I entered, and whilst waiting for the arrival of the funerals, we loitered among the tombs. I was anxious to know, without, however, asking anybody where would be buried the——To the law, to you, sir, he was a great criminal—but to me—he was *my son!*

"Whilst keeping on the side-paths behind the monuments, I beheld, close to the paupers' grave, which I kept looking

at, a man dressed as a journeyman-mason, he even had his tools; a hammer in one hand, a chisel in the other. I fancied he was the same man who came here twice to tell me about Pierre. But I was afraid to speak to him."

"Did he not then come up to you, to point out to you the hearse?"

"He did not, sir."

"Who told you then that the body you saw being buried was Voirbo's?"

"My own heart, sir! A mother can make no mistake in presence of her son's corpse. Besides, anybody could have recognised the hearse—*It was followed by no one*——"

"And who is this gentleman?" I asked turning to the stranger, who had been present at this conversation without saying a word.

"The father—the natural father of him, whom you call Voirbo," replied the man.

I looked hard at him for a moment. His face, somehow, was familiar to me; I wanted to remember where I had seen him. He read my thought, for he observed:

"Don't puzzle your brains Mr. Commissary; this is how you first knew me: It was when you were secretary in the inspectors' department of the Prefecture of Police—when, by order of the Minister of Justice, your superior officer, Monsieur Nusse was instructed to make an inquiry on my account, in consequence of which I was dismissed from my *employment*."

"I remember now—you were assistant-executioner in the town of ——"

"I was, sir."

"And what are you now?"

"Now—now—I am one of the assistants to the executioner of Paris."

"Ah! I can now understand Voirbo's expression of terror, when he told me one day, in a fit of passion, that you had said to him with a shake of the fist: 'You shall die by my hand!'"

"And that fatal prediction might have been realised. Fortunately he preferred to disappear by his own hand from amongst the living!"

THE END.